Oh, Oh, I Love Her So

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Oh, Oh, I Love Her So

by Redacted_username

Summary

Ryuko Matoi begins a new job as a personal assistant to Satsuki Kiryuin CEO. Feel la feels fly, people get punched, and Mako swears like a sailor.

Notes

Business AU. The title is actually the name of the Ramones song that I listened to almost the entire time I wrote it. It is briefly referenced but the Ramones lyrics in the story that are referenced belong to a song called "I Want You Around" if anybody is interested. Also "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" by Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons is referenced.

See the end of the work for more notes

The alarm clock blared, signaling the unholy hour at which Ryuko Matoi needed to wake up. She slammed the top of the offensive object with her fist and groaned, dragging herself out of bed. She readied for an important day: shower, brush teeth, wear professional clothing, tame the wild mane of hair she usually took great pride in. She rarely ever did anything to her hair besides smooth out the single red stripe that swept across her face, making sure it was as prominent as possible, which didn't take much effort. Sadly, making sure it was completely hidden was a much more difficult task, but it was a necessity for the job she was to start today.

Kiryuin Industries was owned and operated, as everyone knew, by the Kiryuin family of course. Head of the family and President was Ragyo Kiryuin, an eccentric woman who, for starting her empire in the fashion industry, had terrible fashion sense in Ryuko's opinion. It wasn't until Ragyo's daughter and heir to the dynasty, Satsuki Kiryuin, was named CEO that the company began to expand their horizons. Today, the company had indomitable control over some of the most profitable industries in the world. IT development, hotel and lodging, and biotechnology to name a few. Ryuko had done her research on Kiryuin Industries before her interview. She had been working for years as a secretary for The Takarada Conglomerate and had grown tired of the boring desk job. When a job listing for a personal assistant at Kiryuin Industries popped up, she immediately applied and began her research. However inefficient she had been at managing her own life, she had discovered she had a knack for managing other people's lives in college. She practically mapped out her best friends college career while barely squeaking by to earn her own degree in economics.

Ryuko stood in front of the elevator, awkwardly smoothing out her skirt and tugging at her jacket sleeves. She was horribly uncomfortable in women's business attire and she was about to meet one of the most powerful, and beautiful, women on the planet. Her interview had been with the personal assistant to Ragyo Kiryuin herself. A serious and curt woman by the name of Rei Hououmaru, who only addressed Ryuko by her last name and always seemed to be taking care of multiple things simultaneously. Ryuko wasn't even sure the woman had heard the responses she had given to the few questions she was asked, except when asked if Ryuko would be available to travel, extensively and internationally. The woman had looked Ryuko square in the eyes and stopped everything she was doing to hear Ryuko's response that yes, she was available and already had a passport.

Ryuko took a deep breath as she pushed the button for the thirtieth floor. She had only ever seen glimpses of Satsuki Kiryuin on the news and once on the cover of a business magazine her old boss had subscribed to. She was absolutely beautiful and, admittedly, absolutely terrified Ryuko at the moment. She had no idea what Satsuki Kiryuin was like and so had only speculation to go off of. She tried, as she stepped off the elevator, to have as few expectations of the woman as possible. She was taken aback by the tiny, blonde, pig tail clad woman who literally jumped over her desk when Ryuko approached it.

"You must be Lady Satsuki's new PA!" There was something incredibly disturbing about the way she came within inches of Ryuko's face to speak. If that wasn't uncomfortable enough, the woman had a stylized eyepatch over one eye and the remaining eye looked her up and down. "Hold on just a second! Don't move a muscle!" She vaulted back over her desk and

punched the intercom. "Oh, Lady Satsuki! Your new assistant is here!" and she winked her remaining eye at Ryuko. A cold, stern voice replied.

"Send her in Nui."

"You got it gorgeous!" Nui motioned in the direction of the massive black double doors to Ryuko's left and giggled. "Good luck!" Ryuko gulped and willed her legs to move against their wishes.

Being inside Satsuki Kiryuin's office for the first time was a daunting experience for Ryuko. Floor to ceiling windows afforded a breath taking view of Tokyo to the right. To the left were several giant flat screen TVs, which at the moment, were tuned to various business news stations, all muted. There were no decorations of any kind anywhere except on the wall directly behind the desk, an elegant collection of katanas adorned the wall. Satsuki Kiryuin herself sat at her desk, fingers steepled, surveying Ryuko, who made her way across the office to introduce herself. She was cut off before she could even begin to speak.

"Matoi Ryuko. Only child, parents deceased, graduated from University of Tokyo…barely, but showed impressive aptitude for management and business affairs while spending a considerable amount of time as secretary for The Takarada Conglomerate." Ryuko swallowed hard, resisting the urge to look at the floor. "Enjoys, and I quote, 'fast cars, loud music, and fine women' from your Facebook page, your birthday is in June, and you turned twenty-six this year," Satsuki Kiryuin stated cooly. "Is this correct?" She asked, an impressive looking eyebrow raised.

"Yes."

"Yes ma'am, Matoi."

"Yes, ma'am." Ryuko was nothing short of horrified that Satsuki had dug into her personal life, and in spite of trying her best to have as few expectations as possible, this was exactly what she had expected Satsuki Kiryuin to be like. Ice cold sapphire eyes continued to stare at Ryuko for a moment and Ryuko unconsciously held her breath as the beautiful and terrifying woman bore holes into her soul.

"You will address me as Lady Satsuki. You will be here promptly at seven o'clock in the morning and leave at six o'clock in the evening unless extenuating circumstances require additional hours. You will carry this on your person at all times." She indicated a sleek black smart phone laid on the desk in front of her. "You will answer any e-mails immediately between the hours of six o'clock in the morning and nine o'clock at night. Any e-mails received after nine o'clock are to be responded to, if not immediately, then by six o'clock the next morning. All phone calls are expected to be answered, regardless of time of day or night. Is that clear?"

"Yes ma'am." Ryuko was starting to wonder exactly what she had gotten herself into. This job paid ridiculously well, but now Ryuko understood at what cost.

"You will accompany me to all major functions and you will travel with me to all business

meetings. Your desk is over there," she pointed to a much smaller desk Ryuko hadn't even seen on her way in. A computer with double monitors, a desk calendar, and a small gold plate that read "Ryuko Matoi, PA" adorned the surface. Ryuko retrieved the phone from Satsuki's desk and swallowed hard again as Satsuki gracefully crossed her legs, attention turning to her own computer screens. "You will already find several e-mails to respond to. Your day starts now."

"Yes ma'am."

That first day was the most exhausting day Ryuko had ever experienced. She silently thanked whatever higher power had given her the thunderbolt of inspiration to do extensive research into the company. Had she not already acquired the information she did, she would have been hopelessly lost, and it was abundantly clear that Satsuki would not tolerate her asking questions. In fact, it seemed like Satsuki preferred not to talk at all, communicating almost exclusively by e-mail, even while in the same room. The only time Satsuki spoke to Ryuko was to send her on a lunch break and to inform her that it was time to leave. Ryuko's elevator ride up that morning was nothing compared to the ride back down that evening. The very air seemed to freeze as the doors closed on the two women. Ryuko dared to glance at Satsuki who stared straight ahead, but spoke unexpectedly.

"Matoi, your work was exceptional for your first day." If Ryuko hadn't known better, she would have taken it as just a complement, but the subtext was clear. 'You did good, but as you learn, improve,' was what was actually said.

"Thank you, Lady Satsuki," Ryuko quietly responded, hoping that the lack of excitement plainly said 'message received'. They parted ways after exiting the building into the parking garage. Ryuko didn't bother to look back when Satsuki was suddenly no longer walking beside her. Usually not one to so hastily part with such attractive company, Ryuko practically ran to her car. The black 1969 Chevrolet Camaro was Ryuko's pride and joy. It had taken her two years to save up enough money to buy and ship it from the US and then another year to save up enough to revamp the engine and stereo system. The mechanic nearly cried when she told him what she wanted and tried to talk her out of it, informing her how much it would actually depreciate the value of the car. She didn't care, she planned to be buried in that car, it was her sanctuary. Once she had started the car and pulled out of the parking space, she could breathe normally again, but her breath caught when she noticed Satsuki watching her drive by, hesitating to enter the town car that had pulled up to her. Ryuko stopped at the exit of the garage and checked her rear view mirror, Satsuki was still watching. *Fast car, loud music, fine woman* she thought to herself and she smirked, turning her stereo up to about half it's capacity as she hit the accelerator, causing her tires to squeal as she pealed out.

The first week working as personal assistant to Satsuki Kiryuin was every bit as busy as Ryuko had anticipated. In spite of Satsuki's closed off and cold demeanor, Ryuko was able to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of how she conducted business. Satsuki was a very straight to the point, no nonsense business woman who clearly understood the seat of power she rested upon. When closing deals, her approach was 'take it, or leave it; but you won't get a better offer anywhere else'. Which was true, no matter how much the deal was

clearly more of a profit for Kiryuin Industries; because to do any kind of business with Kiryuin Industries was practically equivalent to being in league with royalty. What was slightly more difficult to manage, were Satsuki's social calls. Fund raisers, charity events, and dinners that she was invited to. Most of the events that Ryuko placed on the calendar Satsuki instructed (by e-mail of course) to politely decline and send a donation instead. Ryuko was incredibly thankful that, so far, Satsuki had declined to attend all social gatherings, because some boring fund raiser where people stood around stroking each others egos, silently begging for money was not Ryuko's idea of a fun Friday night.

This was exactly what she thought as she pealed out of the garage again at the end of her first week, racing home as fast as she could. She wasted no time stripping out of the horridly uncomfortable clothes she wore, dropping her skirt as soon as the door shut. Pieces of the outfit strewn from front door to bedroom like some depressing bread crumb trail back to the business world. Tonight, there was a Ramones cover band playing at her favorite punk bar and she was meeting her best friend there to blow off some steam. The shower she took only served to return her hair to it's natural state of unruliness, setting her red streak free from it's confinement. She wore tight black pants, a white wife beater tank top, and her biker jacket. She checked her work phone as she pulled on a pair of well worn white sneakers and prayed the wretched thing would stay silent until nine o'clock. Not that it had been as much of an inconvenience as Satsuki had made it seem it would be. She had only received a few e-mails that week after normal business hours and, blessedly, no phone calls. It was still with a twinge of resentment that she shoved the thing into her inside pocket as she left her apartment.

Nobody would know it by just looking, but Mako Mankanshoku was a certified bad-ass. The first time Ryuko met her was at this very same bar their freshman year of college and Ryuko had her eyes on Mako all night. She had that sweet and innocent look that people tended to underestimate at their detriment. Some sleazy rocker made that terrible mistake and Ryuko decided to step in when he wasn't getting the hint that she wasn't interested. When the guy swung at Ryuko, it was Mako that laid him out to the shock of every single person, including Ryuko herself. They both ran for several blocks and eventually stopped to catch their breath. When Mako asked Ryuko why she was running too, Ryuko replied that she was under age with a fake ID. Mako had grinned, showing Ryuko her own fake ID and they both laughed until their stomachs were sore. It was much to Ryuko's pleasant surprise when Mako ended up in her bed that night. Their relationship was explosive and quickly turned volatile, but a few months after it ended, Mako called Ryuko to smooth things over. They'd been best friends ever since, because in spite of romantic incompatibility, Mako seemed to be the only person who had ever truly understood Ryuko and the way she operated. It was half the reason Ryuko was so excited to go out with Mako that night after being stuck with Satsuki "Ice Queen" Kiryuin all week. It was eight o'clock and Ryuko pulled her work phone out of her pocket for the umpteenth time to check for any e-mails.

"Put that fucking thing away! Jeez! You've checked it a million times. Fuck work. It's Friday night. Nobody's still doing business, they're all out sipping fancy shit, loving the smell of their own farts. Fuck them." Mako tried to grab the phone from Ryuko who held it high above the shorter woman's head.

"You don't understand. Ice Queen will skin me alive if I don't answer an e-mail before nine

o'clock and finds out I'm out at a show."

"How the fuck would she know you were out at a show? You just tell her you passed out early from being worked like an asshole." She punched Ryuko in the arm. "Fuckin' square."

"Ow! Fuck! Seriously, she knew my entire life story and made sure I knew she knew. She made sure I knew she would know everything. It was fucking terrifying. It's only another hour, then I'm free." Ryuko and Mako each did a shot when nine o'clock finally came and Ryuko stopped paying attention to her work phone, to the point that she almost forgot about it. When it started vibrating in her pocket, it almost gave her a heart attack. She ran outside and answered the call.

"Hell-"

"If you're still awake, why haven't you responded to my e-mail?" Satsuki demanded in a harsh tone that made Ryuko feel like she had just been caught sneaking out of her house to party.

"Shit. I'm sorry. I'm out with a friend. What-"

"Excuse me? Matoi, do not use foul language when you speak to me." Again with the scolding like a child. Her entire demeanor shrank to match the feeling.

"I apologize, ma'am," and she gritted her teeth in anger.

"The president has requested my presence at an event. I've e-mailed you my address. Get here as soon as you can." Satsuki hung up before Ryuko could respond, which was probably for the best. Ryuko swore under her breath and went to tell Mako she had to leave. The band had just taken the stage and Mako called Satsuki every name in the book as she walked with Ryuko to her car.

"I'm sorry. Come over tomorrow and we'll hang out." Mako puffed out her cheeks and pouted as Ryuko mussed her hair. She turned the key, starting the ignition, and plugged in Satsuki's address to the phone's GPS.

If Ryuko thought she was in trouble for not paying attention to the work phone, she was in even worse trouble for showing up to Satsuki's in the outfit she was wearing. It was actually the first time Ryuko had seen any emotion at all from Satsuki. She stood at the top of a massive staircase in the entryway of the giant mansion, in an elegant full length light blue dress and black heels. Had she not known that she was in so much trouble, Ryuko would have been smitten, but she did know better. After a moment of tapping her foot on the marble floor with an intimidating scowl on her face, she threw her ams up.

"Iori! We have an emergency." A slender blonde haired man in a long white coat and orange face mask almost floated to her side.

"Indeed," he replied and Satsuki strode down the hallway, heels clacking, echoing throughout the cavernous space, hypnotizing Ryuko with the sound. "Come with me Matoi. Let's get you

into something more appropriate, and quickly." He had an almost gentle tone in his voice that oddly comforted her. That sense of comfort was shattered as she stepped onto a platform in front of full length mirrors. He disappeared into another room before re-emerging with a white garment bag in hand. Here was the moment Ryuko was dreading, the moment she would have to swallow her pride and wear a dress. He regarded her for a moment before shaking his head and disappearing again. "I may be wrong," he said as he returned, "and forgive me if I am, but I believe you may be more comfortable in this." He hung a black garnet bag on the rack next to her and unzipped it. Ryuko let out a relieved sigh when she saw the suit. He narrowed his eyes looking her up and down in a studious fashion. "It should fit fairly well and go with your…aesthetic." He twirled a stray piece of his own blonde hair indicating Ryuko's red stripe. He left again, giving her privacy to change and Ryuko called for him when she was dressed. "Excellent. Here." He began to tie a pure silk red tie around her neck with dexterity that Ryuko envied. She knew how to tie her own tie, but he had been much faster and gotten the length perfect in the first shot.

"I look spiffy." She admired her reflection as Iori smoothed out certain places and adjusted her sleeves, laughing softly at her remark.

"It could use some slight tailoring, but will do just fine for tonight. Turn once more for me." She slowly rotated on the platform, jumping about a foot in the air when she saw Satsuki watching from the doorway, an unreadable expression on her face. She only had a moment to wonder how she did not hear Satsuki approach before Iori handed her the contents of her pockets from her previous outfit. He gave Satsuki a thumbs up and she turned on the spot, heels clacking against the floor once again as she left. "Good luck," he whispered quietly and she nodded, practically running out of the room to catch up with Satsuki.

The only redeeming thing about being torn from her planned evening with Mako, was the suit she was now wearing and the opportunity to silently mock the outfit Ragyo Kiryuin was wearing. She looked like some kind of haute couture circus clown; white face, rainbow hair, and all. The event was a launch for a new line in Ragyo's original company, REVOCS clothing. Satsuki had been called along to make important connections with various distinguished guests. For the most part, Satsuki completely ignored Ryuko, except to hand her the various business cards she was given or to make some kind of donation to a company. Even then, Satsuki didn't even look at Ryuko, which irritated Ryuko to no end. She texted mako.

"Man, I'm spiffy as fuck and ice queen won't even look at me." She slipped her phone back in her pocket just before Satsuki handed her another business card.

"Who cares? She seems like a real twat. This show is fucking awesome :p" Mako wasn't making the situation any easier, for two reasons. The first was that Ryuko was missing the show that she had been excited about. The second was pointing out that Ryuko cared that Satsuki hadn't noticed her. She chalked it up to the fact that she looked good and the most beautiful woman in the room hadn't even bothered to appreciate it.

"Yeah, she is. And rub it in why don't ya. Dick." She responded and her attention was demanded again.

When they returned to Satsuki's fortress of a mansion, she left Ryuko in the entry hall without saying a word. Ryuko watched as she climbed the marble staircase, the clacking of her heels seemed to sync with the beating of Ryuko's heart. She stood, staring at Satsuki's ass as she made her ascent, jumping again when Iori appeared at her side, cheeks turning a soft shade of red.

"Ahh, thanks for keeping my baby safe," she said taking her original clothing that he had held out to her, biker jacket resting on top of the neatly folded pile. She looked around for a place to change before turning back to Iori.

"Keep the suit. You'll get more use out of it than I will." Ryuko's mouth dropped.

"Dude, this must be worth more than ten of these," she said, lifting the clothing in her hands, indicating her jacket. He laughed softly again at her out outburst.

"I certainly hope so. I made it myself," and he turned to leave before Ryuko had the chance to say anything else.

"Wow. Yeah. She's definitely a twat." Mako jumped off the couch and admired Ryuko in Iori's suit. "Holy fuck. It's soft as shit. Where did you get this?" She ran her hands from the collar of the jacket down Ryuko's chest and suddenly pulled Ryuko into a rib cracking hug. "I just wanna rub my face on it. Gimmie the jacket!" When Ryuko handed her the jacket and stood in only the vest, shirt, and tie combo, Mako wolf whistled at her. "Everyone there were all a bunch of twats. I'd have jumped your shit!" Ryuko shook her head.

"Yeah, we've already been down that road." Mako giggled a little before roughly burying her face in the soft fabric. "Easy, easy. Iori made that." Mako's eyes went wide.

"Iori Shiro ?! Thee Iori Shiro ?! Jesus Christ you idiot! I'd fucking punt a baby for a Shiro original!!" Mako's wardrobe collection was massive. The woman lived and died by the fashion trends, and apparently was a fan of Iori's work. "How the fuck did you get your hands on this?!"

"Uhhhh, well, ummm," Ryuko prepared herself for the outburst she knew was about to come. "He kind of…gave it to me."

"WHAT THE FUCK ASSHOLE!?! YOU. MET. IORI. SHIRO?!?! Why the fuck didn't you fucking tell me immediately?!" She was screaming at the top of her lungs.

"I didn't know it was the same guy. He's so…nice." Mako's mouth fell open.

"You work for Kiryufuck jr. Why wouldn't it be the same one?! Everyone knows he was solely responsible for saving REVOCS' sorry ass when she brought him in. You're fucking dumb." Ryuko just laughed.

"Ok, ok. If I see him again I'll get his autograph for you." At that, Mako theatrically fell off the couch.

"Just kidnap him and hold him prisoner until he makes me an entire wardrobe," she muttered crawling back onto the couch.

"I'm pretty sure Satsuki would have a hit man to deliver the sewing machine." and Ryuko snorted and she remembered to check her work phone.

"Damn, that bitch has you on a short leash. You never let that phone out of your sight." Mako's words caused Ryuko to blush softly at the imagery. "Oh my God, you fucking like it! You're dumb and twisted." Mako never missed anything.

"Are you kidding?! She barely even talks to me and looks at me even less. I mean, she's gorgeous, but scary as hell. I'm too busy fearing for my life to have any time to like it."

"Whatever you say. I'm not judging or anything. Chicks in power are hot. I get the kink. Whatever gets your rocks off." Ryuko shoved Mako off the couch to keep her from seeing her turn even more red as her insides squirmed uncomfortably.

"Alright. That's enough out of you. Don't you have some shopping to do or something ass face?" Ryuko got up and walked Mako to the door.

"Yeah. I gotta go hit up some sweet weekend deals. Thanks for the breakfast, perfect recovery from last night. See ya shit head."

Ryuko changed out of the suit and hung it gingerly against the back of her closet door. The one and only time Satsuki had really looked at her was when she first put it on. The unreadable expression she had on her face that Ryuko still couldn't figure out what it meant exactly. She had the feeling Satsuki didn't regard her as an actual person, but merely as a walking, talking, interactive extension of her day planner. Still, there was nothing wrong with looking every now and then. She smirked to herself remembering watching Satsuki climb the massive staircase as she left her apartment. The rest of her weekend was quiet and uneventful, at least in terms of her job. Ryuko's favorite activity was to cruise around down by Tokyo bay, music cranked so loud she could feel it in her soul.

Monday came way too quickly for Ryuko. She was frantically running around her apartment, trying to get ready and keep up with the torrential flood of e-mails that had began to pour in. The strange thing was that they were not addressed directly to her with Satsuki attached as a CC like usual. Instead they were to Satsuki and coming to Ryuko automatically based on the way the accounts were set up, so there was nothing for Ryuko to actually respond to. Ironing her skirt and reading the e-mails proved to be dangerous for Ryuko, who swore loudly as she ran to the kitchen to run cool water over her burnt hand. She made it to the office with a single minute to spare. She was in such a rush to sit behind her desk and begin her work day that she hadn't noticed that there was a small crowd of people in the office already. A small crowd that all stared silently and blankly at her before turning their attention back to Satsuki.

Ryuko could have sworn she saw Satsuki shaking her head, but when she had a proper view, Satsuki wasn't even looking at her. This meeting had seemed to be the reason for all the e-mails.

"Matoi Ryuko. No doubt you've noticed her name in the e-mails, so you will now be directing any communications you may have for me, through her." Satsuki spoke without turning around from her attention focused on the many TVs on the wall. Every one was tuned to a different stock market analysis channel from local to international markets. Ryuko took a moment to observe the motley looking crowd of four that stood on the opposite side of Satsuki's desk. Iori had actually turned and gave her a small smile in greeting but the other three made no direct acknowledgment of her. She sat back down, not realizing that she had stood when Satsuki had said her name, and started responding to the usual business e-mails.

It was nearly lunch time before the small group of people that had surrounded Satsuki's desk all morning began to break up. Iori was the first to approach Ryuko's desk, the rest slowly following.

"Matoi, I hope I'm not interrupting, but I'd like to introduce the officers of Kiryuin Industries," he gave her a look that was clearly apologetic for anything that may come from the interactions. Ryuko, unsure of how to address Iori in the office, simply nodded. A blue haired man with thick glasses and a large tablet stepped up to Ryuko's desk.

"This is Inumuta Houka. Chief Analytics Officer and head of the IT development division." Inumuta didn't even look at Ryuko or actually speak to her, he was analyzing something on his tablet. When Iori cleared his throat and nudged him slightly, Inumuta looked up, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose by the edge with his pinky finger, an action that Ryuko found unique.

"Matoi," he nodded, "we'll be in touch," and he left the room. Iori rolled his eyes as the next person approached her desk. He was taller than anybody Ryuko had ever seen and extremely muscular. The man introduced himself before Iori could.

"Gamagori Ira. Chief Audit Executive," he fixed Ryuko with a serious look, "and head of the hotel and lodging division." Gamagori actually held his hand out to shake Ryuko's. She had to choke back a yelp as he came dangerously close to crushing her hand. "Work on your handshake Matoi. If you're going to be accompanying Lady Satsuki around the world, you need a good firm handshake." She bit back the urge to argue, recognizing that she was in no position to do so at the moment. Gamagori left as Ryuko massaged her injured hand. Iori gave her the same apologetic look as the last member squared up to Ryuko's desk. The short pink haired woman had a look of serious disapproval on her face.

"So you're the slacker who failed to respond to every e-mail this morning," she accused. Ryuko actually opened her mouth to argue this time before she caught the look of warning in Iori's eyes and closed it. "Don't do it again." The woman left without even introducing herself, which Iori promptly remedied.

"That's Jakuzure Nonon. Chief Operating Officer for Kiryuin Industries, mostly just for the title. She spends most of her time overseeing the biotechnology division." Ryuko nodded, she

made a mental note to make them a high priority from now on whenever she saw their names.

"What about you?" Ryuko asked him.

"Me? I am lead designer of REVOCS, but Lady Satsuki is the one who brought me in, so she brings me in on all the meetings," he calmly explained.

"You mean technically you don't work for Lady Satsuki?" She asked, confused as to why he made the distinction. He began to answer but stopped and turned on the spot at the sound of his name.

"Iori…enough." Satsuki fixed him with a warning glare that raised the hair on the back of Ryuko's neck for reasons she would rather die than admit out loud in that moment. Iori, however, took it in stride. He bowed to her and left.

Once again, so far that day, the only thing Satsuki had actually said directly to Ryuko was that it was time for her to go to lunch. During business hours, Ryuko had never once seen Satsuki receive a direct call, ever. So Ryuko took her time clearing her desk to eavesdrop when she noticed Satsuki on a phone call that Ryuko had not first answered.

"No, I absolutely cannot today." There was a pause. "Just because I cannot leave does not imply I will not eat. Since when do you concern yourself with such things?" Another pause. "I don't care what mother will think. Lie to her if you must." Ryuko didn't get to hear the rest of Satsuki's side of the conversation due to a severe look thrown in her direction. To her horror, she found herself face to face with Nui, the secretary, as she ran out of the office, face burning.

"Oh my!" She giggled in a disgustingly sweet tone, quite out of place for a person who had also been caught eavesdropping. "What's got you so red?" Ryuko side stepped the tiny woman and mumbled as she bolted through the door to the stairway. There was no way in hell she was going to walk down thirty flights of stairs, but she would have if it meant keeping anyone from seeing the way she reacted to Satsuki's glare.

She had been on the phone with Mako almost the entire time she was on her lunch break. This was getting out of control and Ryuko blamed Mako for it. If she hadn't gone and said it out loud then Ryuko wouldn't be having such a hard time keeping herself under control.

"I just call it like I see it. Matwat and Kiryufuck sittin' in a tree…"

"Shhhhh! Stop! Don't let people hear you saying that!" Ryuko pleaded as Mako continued to sing loudly into the phone.

"Oh please, get a grip shit head. That stuck up McThunderCunt would be so lucky to have you. If only she'd take time out of her busy schedule of looking down her fucking nose at people and over inflating her own importance to take the time to notice. Relax. You have a crush Ryuko. It's not the end of the world." Mako was so eloquent.

"No, having a crush isn't a problem. Having a crush on the most powerful woman in the

world who also happens to be my boss, is."

"Seriously? Do you listen to yourself when you talk or do you just spit out whatever materializes inside of your thick skull? She's a person too. I hate to break it to you, but she eats, sleeps, and shits just like the rest of us. Your problem is you've fallen in line with the rest of the sheep she's got thinking she doesn't put her panties on one leg at a time too and put her up on a fucking pedestal."

"Please don't talk about Satsuki's panties." Ryuko buried her face in her arms, feeling the blood rush to her face again.

"Ok, look, I'll level with you. Should you have a crush on your boss? Probably not. And even though I don't personally buy into the whole 'most powerful woman in the world' bit, I can see how it would make it even more daunting. But that's no excuse for Ryuko Matoi to be acting like a little bitch. Do I have to come kick your ass?"

"Probably…no. You're right." Ryuko felt herself relax as she laughed at Mako's threat.

"Good. Now pull yourself together. I gotta get back to work, go forth and conquer Satsuki's panties."

"WHAT! NO! MAKO," but Mako had hung up before Ryuko had the chance to properly yell at her. Her face was bright red again and people around her were staring due to her yelling.

Ryuko decided that the way she would handle this, was to look at Satsuki as much as possible. Sort of like exposure therapy. The rest of that day and the next day weren't very successful. She glanced at Satsuki only twice, when Satsuki told her to go on lunch break the next day, and when she said to go home. It wasn't until leaving on Friday that Ryuko really put herself to the test. They were in the elevator and Ryuko's eyes followed Satsuki's hand as she pressed the button for the ground floor. She glanced at Satsuki for a few seconds before her eyes returned to the floor. She pulled at her skirt uncomfortably before glancing up again. She looked down again and when she had finished fidgeting with the sleeve of her jacket, she looked back up again. This time, it was directly into Satsuki's eyes.

"Matoi, can I help you with something?" Panic set in and Ryuko spat out the first lie she could think of.

"I was just…wondering where you get your eyebrows done. They're flawless. I need to get mine done." Hoping it would make it seem more believable, she ran a finger over her own eyebrow. Satsuki furrowed her own flawless eyebrows and fixed Ryuko with a look that proverbially pinned her to the wall.

"You don't get your eyebrows done and neither do I," she responded cooly. Ryuko couldn't stop the laughter before it burst out of her. "What is so funny? Am I incorrect? You don't seem the type." Ryuko calmed herself as the elevator doors opened. As they stepped into the parking garage, Ryuko paused for a moment.

"No," she began, "ma'am," she added quickly. "You're not wrong. I'm not the type at all." She

started to laugh again before she began walking to her car. As she unlocked the door, she looked at Satsuki again, shocked to see the hint of an amused expression on her face. Then she got brave. "Have a nice weekend Lady Satsuki," she yelled, waving with one hand and tossing the God awful jacket across to the passenger seat. Satsuki just nodded and Ryuko hopped in her car, engine roaring as she sped out like always.

Ryuko spent the weekend bracing herself for Monday. She was sure there would be some backlash for her strange behavior Friday afternoon. Probably a lecture about proper workplace etiquette and blah blah blah. The more time she spent talking to Mako about all of it, the more her attitude started to mimic Mako's on the subject. She found it easier to regard Satsuki almost as a caricature of some horrible boss, even though she really wasn't that bad. Just cold, unapproachable, and demanding. Even still, she made sure her outfit was cleaned and ironed and got to the office early Monday morning.

"Matoi." Ryuko was ready for it, but cringed reflexively.

"Yes, Lady Satsuki?" She played with the hem of her skirt nervously.

"Why do you wear those clothes?" Ryuko was thrown completely off center at the question that came out of left field.

"It's professional business attire ma'am. That's what I was told to wear." She was trying to figure out where Satsuki was going with this. There was no way she was under dressed and she only ever wore dark shades of grey or black.

"You were much more comfortable in the suit that Iori fitted you in last Friday night, were you not?" Satsuki had basically dropped a bomb on Ryuko.

"What?" Satsuki closed her eyes and sighed.

"The suit you wore last Friday. You were more comfortable in that than what you are wearing now. Is that an accurate statement?"

"How did you know-" Satsuki lost her patience and cut Ryuko off.

"Matoi, it's a simple question. Just answer it," she snapped.

"It is ma'am."

"Thank you. As you know, we are going to New York at the beginning of next month. Go see Iori for a proper fitting so he can make you more. I will inform him you are on your way." Ryuko's mouth fell open in shock, but she turned on the spot and marched out the door as Satsuki picked up her phone. "Iori, I'm sending Matoi down. Take her measurements and make sure she has at least a weeks supply of suits for the New York trip."

"I was wondering when you were going to send her. I thought the look fit her rather well." He responded.

"Hmmm, yes. I agree. Work your magic," and she placed the receiver back in it's cradle, the faintest ghost of a smile on her lips.

Ryuko was incredibly excited and nervous for the New York trip. She was excited because she had never been to the US. She had gone on a trip to India with Mako almost a year ago to the date but going to the US, especially New York, was incredibly appealing to Ryuko. She always preferred American punk to British punk and New York City was the birthplace of her favorite band. Ryuko could practically write a biography about The Ramones and could fill several volumes of text listing all the reasons why she loved their music. The other reason she was particularly excited for the trip was because she would be wearing the suits Iori had tailored specifically for her. She was on her way back from picking them up at the office the Sunday morning before she left when she called Mako to come over to show them off.

"Good lord, the man is a genius!" Mako gushed as Ryuko emerged from her room to show off the last suit. A perfectly tailored three piece; black shirt, red vest, and black jacket. "They're all amazing and you look fucking fantastic in them."

"Just wait. It gets better." Ryuko smiled as she reached into her inner jacket pocket, pulling out a post-it note. She handed it to Mako whose eyes got wider and wider as she read.

"He touched this! He wrote on this! He signed this!" Mako was shrieking.

"Do you not understand what it is?" Mako was practically vibrating.

"IT'S A DATE AND TIME FOR A FUCKING FITTING WITH IORI SHIRO!!! I know what the fuck it is," and she flung herself at Ryuko. "How the hell did you manage this?!" Ryuko had to peel Mako's arms from around her before she could properly speak.

"I told him I couldn't wait to try them on and show them to my friend who was a huge fan of his work and asked if he could just sign a piece of paper for her because it would make her day. Then he said that he would be honored if you would come in for a fitting because he's always looking to draw new inspiration and he gave me that." Mako nearly fainted when Ryuko was finished telling the story.

"I'm dead. I've died and this is Heaven and…I'm not entirely sure why I'm here. I'm not worthy." She flopped herself back down on the couch as Ryuko left to change back into regular clothes. "So, how has it been with the queen of the world?" Ryuko thought for a moment as she stared at the suit she had just hung back up on the rack she had placed over the closet door, several realizations hitting her all at once. "Ryuko! Get out here and use your words."

"She did notice me that night."

"What?"

"That night I had to leave you at the show and go to that stupid REVOCS launch party. She did notice me…" Ryuko was staring out the living room window.

"Aaaaaand?" Mako prompted Ryuko to continue.

"And she's been noticing me ever since. That's why I have all of those. She asked me why I wore the skirts and shit and if I was more comfortable in Iori's suit then sent me down to get fitted." Ryuko's heart began to race.

"Ok, I thought your little crush was amusing at first, but I literally just watched the floor fall out from under you. Slow your roll there McLovin'. So she had a moment of goodness. Doesn't erase a month of treating you like a glorified calendar. Also doesn't mean she's madly in love with you. Do you even know if she likes women? Do you know if she even likes men?" Ryuko's thoughts were already far, far gone. It took Mako snapping her fingers inches from Ryuko's nose to bring her back to reality.

"You're right. You're always right. How do you do that?" Ryuko mused regaining her composure.

"I know what goes on in your head. It's not that difficult you know. You're actually pretty transparent. Seriously though. New subject. What are you gonna do in New York?!"

"Satsuki is meeting with a few advertising firms, a pharmaceutical company, and some major fashion labels." Ryuko nodded meaningfully at Mako but was surprised when this piece of information did not prompt another excited outburst. "Then of course there's a bunch of dinners and shit with important people."

"I don't give a shit about your ice queen's itinerary. You're going to New York City! The birth place! The mecca!"

"I'm gonna do my best, but I don't think I'll exactly have time for sight seeing. I really want to go to Coney Island though. Just to see it, and get a hot dog." Ryuko laughed but Mako stared at her in disbelief.

"You mean to tell me you're going to New York fucking City and you're not gonna go to CBGBs?" Ryuko instantly sombered.

"Mako, when are you going to accept that it's gone?"

"NEVER!" Ryuko began laughing again.

"I don't know. Maybe, if I have time."

"Make time shit head! I want pictures!"

Ryuko's only experience with international travel was with Mako and it was vastly different compared to international travel with Satsuki. Of course Kiryuin Industries owned a private airfield and a small fleet of private jets. Ryuko arrived at the airfield early, but as usual Satsuki was already there and Ryuko silently thanked the heavens that she had decided to wear one of her new suits. They were incredibly comfortable so traveling while wearing it wouldn't be a problem, aside from the fact that Ryuko could wear them every day, every where, and probably never get tired of them. She retrieved her suitcase and garment bag from her car and began to walk towards Satsuki as she received a folder from Iori.

"I have every faith you will be able to handle this on your own, however, should they need some persuasion, show these." He turned to Ryuko, a small gentle smile on his face as he regarded his handiwork, "or this." When they both turned to Satsuki, she was already halfway up the staircase of the jet. Ryuko turned back to Iori,

"If you have any trouble with Mako, just call me." He looked at her, confused as to why there would be trouble. "Just keep it in mind, if you need a handler. Thanks again for these. They really are perfect, I love them."

"Of course they are. Don't keep Lady Satsuki waiting." He quickly adjusted the knot of her tie as Satsuki stuck her head back out of the door to see what was keeping Ryuko.

An attendant took Ryuko's luggage from her as soon as she entered the jet, which was a good thing because she probably would have dropped it all as she admired her surroundings. The chairs themselves were big enough for Ryuko to curl up in and sleep as they were, but there were still beds behind them at the far end. A dining room like table complete with dining room chairs in the middle section, and a massive TV on the dividing wall between cabin and cockpit. Satsuki resumed her seat, gracefully crossing her right leg over the left before motioning to Ryuko to sit.

"Matoi, you're going to make us late for take off if you continue to stand there. There will be plenty of time to stare during the flight. Sit down."

Ryuko silently took her seat and pulled her phone out of her pocket, plugging in headphones. Her favorite part of flying was always the take off and she plastered her face to the window as the engines fired to life. It was so early in the morning that it was still dark outside but Ryuko watched as the ground fell further and further away, until the street lights were tiny specs, until she fell asleep.

When Ryuko woke up, she was surprised to find herself covered in a blanket with a pillow behind her head. She stretched her legs and yawned loudly, garnering a throat clearing from Satsuki. She found Satsuki working at the table on a laptop and sat opposite her, shaking her head to fully wake herself up.

"What time is it?" she asked pulling out her phone.

"The actual time is irrelevant until we land. We have been in flight for about five hours. You should not have slept during the first half of the flight." Satsuki didn't even bother to look at Ryuko as she scolded her.

"I didn't mean to." For some reason, the second they reached cruising altitude, on any flight, Ryuko always fell asleep. It happened every time she flew anywhere, regardless of the duration of the actual flight. She usually woke up again when starting the decent with the change in altitude, but this was a twelve and a half hour flight.

"I expect you to accompany me to all meetings and events I will attend." Satsuki closed the laptop and looked up at Ryuko.

"I know. Look, I can't help it. It'll be fine." Ryuko was not happy about being scolded, as usual, like a child right after she woke up. It was for this reason that she spoke without regard for whom she was speaking to. "I just pass the fuck out on plane ri-"

"Matoi! I have already told you once. Do not use foul language when you speak to me. It will not be tolerated. Do not make me have to remind you a third time." Ryuko grit her teeth as Satsuki go up from the table and made her way to the back of the jet to one of the beds. The small part of Ryuko that was excited for this trip specifically because of all the time she would spend with Satsuki, died in that moment. Before they left, she had wondered if Satsuki would be as cold and professional as she was in the office during the time they would spend outside of a business like setting.

"I guess that answers my question," she mumbled as she replaced the headphones in her ears moving back to her seat to stare out the window.

When the jet landed, Ryuko pulled her phone out of her pocket and watched the time adjust. She was horrified to watch the time change from five o'clock Monday evening, to four o'clock…Monday morning. Suddenly, she realized why Satsuki had made it very clear that she was expected to attend all meetings, because the first meeting was in four hours. Not tomorrow in for hours, today in four hours. By the time they got to the hotel, Ryuko had no time for even a quick cat nap. She needed to shower and fix her hair to hide the red streak before meeting Satsuki in the lobby for probably the most important meeting of the whole trip.

Ryuko didn't actually start dragging until about five o'clock in the afternoon that day, which was understandable because it was actually six o'clock in the morning the next day back at home. She was trying to keep up with e-mails coming in from Jakuzure about the meeting earlier that day and from Inumuta about a cocktail party they were about to attend. She was sitting at a table outside the coffee shop across the street from the luxury hotel they were staying at.

"Why haven't you changed?" Satsuki's voice cause Ryuko to jump. She was holding a large cup, dressed in an elegant evening party dress, frowning at Ryuko. She had been wearing a business suit earlier. Ryuko didn't say anything in response, her level of exhaustion would have caused another outburst that would have probably gotten her fired on the spot. Instead, she silently walked back across the street to put on a different suit. A majority of the color accents Iori had provided her with were red, of course, to avoid clashing with the streak in her hair. It was obvious that he had intended for the one blue vest he provided to be worn for this event, it matched Satsuki's dress perfectly. Not that she particularly cared about matching

with Satsuki at the moment, but she didn't want Iori's effort to go unseen. When Ryuko returned to the coffee shop, Satsuki regarded her with the same unreadable expression as the first time Ryuko had worn a suit in her presence, and just like the first time Ryuko tried to interpret it, she came up with nothing.

Much like the first social gathering Ryuko had attended with her, Satsuki paid very little direct attention to her. However, unlike the first gathering Ryuko had attended, Satsuki had become concerned with having Ryuko next to her as opposed to trailing slightly behind her. In fact, the only time Satsuki spoke to Ryuko that night, was to point out that she had fallen behind again. Just like at the coffee shop, Ryuko did not have the energy required to practice the level of self control a respectful response would require, so she said nothing. Luckily, nothing of any major importance transpired at this party other than making an appearance and introductions to people Satsuki would be formally meeting with later in the week. By the time they returned to the hotel, Ryuko was so tired she could have fallen asleep standing up. She barely noticed that they had arrived at their adjacent rooms until Satsuki stopped suddenly in front of the door to retrieve her room key from her clutch purse. Ryuko thrust her hand into her pocket and retrieved her own, thankfully inserting it into the door the correct way on the first try. Had she not been so exhausted, she might have noticed that Satsuki stood, key in hand, watching her. Instead she practically fell through the door and let it slam shut on the longest day of her life.

The week wore on at a terribly slow pace. Mostly this had to do with the fact that Satsuki spent three quarters of her time ignoring Ryuko, and the other quarter continuing to scold her for seemingly insignificant things. By Wednesday night, Ryuko had been reprimanded for not wearing a tie with one of her suits to a dinner, taking too long to go put on a tie, not responding to an e-mail that could have waited immediately (due to the fact that she was organizing information Satsuki would need for the very event the e-mail was about), handing Satsuki a cup of tea without an actual slice of lemon in it, and last but not least, sneezing too loudly. Ryuko was usually able to let the cutting remarks Satsuki made at the office slide, but every single one of the rebukes she had received over the last few days came outside of business activities. The straw that broke the camels back was lain on Friday afternoon.

"Stop dragging your feet. It's unbecoming." Satsuki barked. Ryuko stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, trying to stop the flood of anger, but it burst from it's damn when Satsuki turned to look at Ryuko, a reproachful look on her face.

"Is it possible for you to go more than four hours without nitpicking at something I've done?! Would it kill you to be nice to me?! Just once?! You haven't said one nice thing to me since… not even halfway through the flight here! I don't give a shhhh- I don't care what you say, or don't say to me at the office or in meetings, but you could at least acknowledge my fffffreaking presence at like dinners and shutoff! You know what," she threw her arm up and hailed a taxi that came almost immediately. "Here. Get in, the fare is on me." She held the door open for Satsuki, who much to Ryuko's shock, got in and closed the door without taking the money Ryuko had held out to her.

If there was a good day and time for her to have gone off on Satsuki like that, it was right then and there. They had been on their way back to the hotel and were free for the night. Ryuko just walked for a while, letting herself calm down from the outburst. She didn't want

to go anywhere near the hotel or Satsuki for the rest of the day and realized that it was the perfect time to go see the things she wanted to see. She decided to start with a trip to, what used to be, CBGBs. She managed to get to the location and stood outside what was once one of the most legendary venues in the world. Today, what was in front of her, was a designer menswear store. She stood against the brick wall and closed her eyes for a moment, imagining she was waiting outside to get into a show. She imagined the muffled sounds of driving power chords and raspy singers that once emanated from within. The fact that the venue that had put the likes of The Ramones and Joan Jett on the map had been turned into some monkey suit boutique made her angry again. She almost forgot to snap a picture for Mako before walking away. She knew that would happen and had strategically planned to visit this site first, then make the trip to Coney Island to cheer herself up. The only real draw to the place was a mention of it in one of her favorite Ramones songs and during the time her and Mako had dated, they used to joke about running away there.

It was only forty-five minutes away by subway and by the time she got there, it was the perfect time for dinner. Ryuko had been to a boardwalk before but never anything close to what she was now surrounded by. The lights on the rides were hypnotizing and the smell of the food made her stomach growl. She found a place called "Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs" and ordered a Coney Island. Admittedly, she was disappointed by it, only due to the fact that there was something called "chili" on top of it. The onions and mustard were fine, but she could have done without the weird meat sauce on top. She got another plain hot dog and throughly enjoyed that one. As she strolled down the boardwalk, she suddenly felt very alone. Even as angry with Satsuki as she was, a part of her wished Satsuki had been with her. Maybe Satsuki would have loosened up a little and had some fun. Maybe she would have gotten on the roller coaster or the ferris wheel with Ryuko, but as it was, Ryuko wasn't going to go by herself. That was too depressing. She sat at a bar and ordered a beer, cursing under her breath when her work phone rang. She knew she was in enough trouble already and didn't need to add to it by ignoring a call, especially from Satsuki herself.

"'ello," she answered thickly after swallowing a mouthful of her drink.

"Were you sleeping?" Satsuki asked and Ryuko had only a split second to decide how to respond.

"No," she said slowly and held her breath for what could be coming next.

"I knocked on your door and there was no answer."

"That's because I'm not there." Ryuko heard Satsuki sigh and, even though she wasn't present, she knew exactly the look of annoyance that was probably plastered on Satsuki's face. She knew she was in major trouble now, for shouting at Satsuki earlier and now being out after nine o'clock.

"I suppose I'll just order room service then. Don't stay out too late. We have breakfast with Area 17 tomorrow before we leave." This was not at all what Ryuko expected to hear.

"Y-Yeah. Wait, what do you mean room service?" Satsuki sighed again before hanging up. Ryuko left the phone to her ear for several minutes before the realizations that Satsuki had

hung up, and that Satsuki was going to ask her to get something to eat set in. She finished her beer and made her way back to the subway station to catch a taxi. The fare from Coney Island back into downtown Manhattan would be ridiculous, but Ryuko didn't feel like being surrounded by people anymore. Her stomach twisted uncomfortably when she passed a hotel attendant pushing a cart of empty dishes as she stepped off the elevator. She could have had a non-business related meal with Satsuki Kiryuin if she hadn't ran off like that. Mako's words echoed in her head as she walked to her room, *So she had a moment of goodness. Doesn't erase a month of treating you like a glorified calendar*. No, it didn't then and it didn't now, but it also didn't stop the crush she shouldn't have had on her boss from resurfacing either.

When Ryuko stepped off of the elevator the next morning she found Satsuki waiting for her in the lobby. She nervously re-adjusted her tie and unbuttoned the suit jacket as she made her way to Satsuki's side, readying herself for some sharp edged comment about her behavior yesterday.

"You can take that off." Ryuko just blinked at Satsuki for a moment. "Your jacket. This is a fairly informal affair and the people we will be dining with are not the same executive types we have been dealing with all week. A more trendy business casual look will serve us well." Ryuko removed her jacket and gave it to the concierge to hold. Satsuki scrutinized her appearance again. "And your red streak." Ryuko ran a hand straight back through her hair before bringing it forward again, freeing her crimson stripe from it's captivity. Ryuko could have sworn Satsuki's lips curled, for just a second, into the slightest of smiles before her face set into that same unreadable expression whenever she regarded Ryuko in a suit.

"Good?" Ryuko asked and Satsuki furrowed her brow. "Is that better ma'am?" She corrected herself.

"Yes. You look…well rested," and she turned quickly to leave.

As far as Ryuko could tell, the breakfast went fairly well. Instead of acquiring a deal, it seemed like Satsuki was setting up to employ Area 17's services. They were an independently owned web development agency baised in New York and Paris, but Ryuko was at a loss for exactly why Satsuki would require their services. Ryuko couldn't tell exactly how things were going due to the fact that Satsuki was being incredibly vague about details when asked. She could only speculate that things went well because before they parted ways, they spoke of setting up a meeting with the Paris team. What Ryuko liked best about this particular gathering, was that when they did part ways, each member of Area 17 they met with also shook Ryuko's hand and bid her farewell, something nobody else bothered to do.

Ryuko did her best to try and stay awake when the jet took off. Her forehead was plastered to the window in an attempt to occupy herself by watching the scenery, but her head kept lolling forward and each time she'd snap back up, replacing her head against the window again. The next time she fell forward, her head fell onto a pillow. When she snapped her head back up, she found Satsuki holding the pillow, head turned to the side not looking at Ryuko.

"Er, thanks?" Ryuko mumbled sleepily before taking the pillow from Satsuki and placing it against the window.

"There's a bed you can use," Satsuki said as she returned to her laptop set up on the dining table, but Ryuko was already asleep again. She woke up and checked her phone for the time out of habit. It told her that it was nine o'clock at night, which meant that he had slept through exactly half the flight. Satsuki was still at the dining table working on her laptop and looked up as Ryuko stretched. She sat in the chair opposite Satsuki and her stomach growled loudly. Before Ryuko could ask if there was any food, Satsuki pushed the covered plate that sat between them closer to her. As she ate, she stole glances at Satsuki, who seemed to be concentrating so intently on whatever she was typing that she didn't notice.

"I still do not get my eyebrows done Matoi. Is there something else you require?" Ryuko nearly choked on the piece of steak she was about to swallow and once again, blurted out the first lie she could think of.

"Ketchup," she said once she recovered from a fit of coughing. Satsuki actually looked up from her work and glared at Ryuko.

"That is the highest grade of kobe. You will not defile that beautiful fillet with such a disgusting condiment. You will not receive…ketchup," and she returned to her work. Ryuko didn't dare to look up at Satsuki again for the rest of her meal. When she was finished, she returned to her seat and stared down at the vast dark ocean below her. She fished her headphones out of her pocket queuing up her music and shortly after, fell asleep again. She woke up as the jet began it's decent, shaking her head in an attempt to dissipate the grogginess from over sleeping. She definitely needed a better strategy to deal with international travel. When she got into her car, she took a deep breath and checked her phone. Four o'clock, Sunday; she had lost an entire day and slept too much to be able to sleep that night.

Like the first day in New York, Ryuko had no choice but to stay awake through the night and all of the next day to fix her sleep schedule. She had consumed more coffee than she cared to admit to stay awake throughout the work day, but nobody would have noticed anyway. Satsuki spent the entire day in a massive meeting with Gamagori, Inumuta, Jakuzure, and Iori. Ryuko had been instructed to inform anyone trying to reach Satsuki that she would be unavailable all day. Ryuko spent her day setting up meetings with people who wanted to know the outcome of Satsuki's ventures in New York and beginning to set up the trip to Paris to meet with Area 17 again. It was shortly after Ryuko had returned from her lunch that an odd e-mail came in.

From: <SanageyamaUzu@dojomasters.net>
To: <MatoiRyuko@KI.com>
Cc: <KiryuinSatsuki@KI.com>
Subject: <No Subject>

Please inform Lady Satsuki that she is late for our lunch.

Sanageyama Uzu

Chief Executive Officer
Dojo Masters Inc.
Tokyo, Japan

Ryuko checked, and re-checked, Satsuki's schedule for the day. There was nothing about a lunch with anyone, just a solid block of meeting all day. Ryuko knew that there had been meals brought to the conference room, that's how big of a deal this meeting was. She responded how Satsuki had directed her to, that Satsuki was unavailable in a meeting for the rest of the day. A response came quickly,

From: <SanageyamaUzu@dojomasters.net>
To: <MatoiRyuko@KI.com>
Cc: <KiryuinSatsuki@KI.com>
Subject: <No Subject>

Please remind Lady Satsuki that Lady Ragyo will not be pleased to hear she has skipped another lunch with her fiancé.

Sanageyama Uzu
Chief Executive Officer
Dojo Masters Inc.
Tokyo, Japan

Ryuko's mouth fell open as she read. How had she been Satsuki's assistant for a month and not known that Satsuki was engaged? Who was this Sanageyama Uzu? Her racing thoughts were interrupted by an e-mail from Satsuki.

From: <KiryuinSatsuki@KI.com>
To: <MatoiRyuko@KI.com>
Subject: <No Subject>

Do not respond to Sanageyama.

-KS

Ryuko knew better than to ask any questions and returned to setting up the Paris trip. The main goal was of course to meet with Area 17's Paris team, but there were plenty of other opportunities to take advantage of while they were there. There was little point to going all the way to France to just meet with a single company. A second e-mail from Satsuki broke her concentration.

From: <KiryuinSatsuki@KI.com>
To: <MatoiRyuko@KI.com>
Subject: <No Subject>

You may leave for the day.

-KS

In spite of the way it was worded, Ryuko understood that this was not an option, but an order. Mako came over later that afternoon to hear all about her trip.

"I can't believe you actually got to go to Coney Island! How was it? Did you get a hot dog?" Mako was sitting cross legged in the middle of the living room floor practically bouncing with excitement. Ryuko rolled onto her side and propped her head against the arm of the couch before answering.

"Coney Island was great but the hot dog was kinda gross. They put this stuff called chili on top and it was just weird. I can't believe I got go either."

"How did you get away from the browmaster?" Mako wiggled her eyebrows and screwed her face up in a severe expression, Ryuko laughed nervously.

"I got tired of her nitpicking and pretending I didn't exist and yelled at her in the middle of the street." Mako stopped wiggling her eyebrows and gasped. "Then I hailed a cab and told her to get in. Then I ran away to CBGBs. Oh, I got a picture for you."

"And you're still *alive*?" Mako brought up a fair point. It had been pushed out of her mind by trying to decipher Satsuki's vague responses at breakfast the next day.

"Yeah," she answered distractedly. "She still hasn't said anything about it. I'm pretty sure she was going to ask me to get food with her later that night."

"What?!"

"She said that she'd just get room service because I was out. I asked her what she meant but she just hung up." Suddenly everything out of the ordinary that had happened after she shouted at Satsuki came back to her. Telling Ryuko she looked well rested the next day after she could have sworn she saw Satsuki smile at her. The pillow on the plane. Satsuki caught her sneaking glances at her again. She suddenly colored thinking about how stupid she had been blurting out that she wanted ketchup.

"Oh no. Earth to shit head! You still have a raging crush on her! Did you guys share a room?" Mako sneered and Ryuko turned even brighter red at the thought.

"No! We had separate rooms ass face. It doesn't matter anyway," she said as she flopped over onto her back, staring blankly at the ceiling. "She's engaged to some guy named Sanageyama. Ever heard the name?" Mako shook her head.

"That sucks. Maybe the next CEO babe you assist will let you bone her on her desk." Mako pulled Ryuko up to her feet off the couch.

"God, you can't put shit like that in my head!" Ryuko shook her head violently to rid herself of the mental image of Satsuki bent over her desk and the smaller woman snickered villainously.

"Come on. Let's go out and find someone who can take your mind off of Kiryuin jr. for a while," but Ryuko's work phone rang.

"Shit, hold on. Hello?"

"Matoi. There are a few matters I must discuss with you." Ryuko swallowed hard.

"Ok, I can be at the office in about half an hour."

"No. The office is not an appropriate setting. You will find my address in an e-mail," and Satsuki hung up.

"Yeah, I…already have it," Ryuko said to the phone. She grabbed her suit jacket from the kitchen counter and ushered Mako out before her.

Ryuko sped through traffic to get to Satsuki's mansion at the edge of the city. The entire time she drove, her thoughts raced just as quickly and she rolled down the window, letting the cool evening air whip across her hot face. Why was she so nervous? She had been to Satsuki's mansion before. She just spent a week in a foreign city with Satsuki and was fine. She was mumbling to herself as the iron gates opened to the driveway.

"She's just your boss. She's engaged. She's way off limits." She parked her car "She's…" Satsuki was standing in the open doors of her residence and Ryuko's shoulders slumped. "She's sexy as fuck. Damnit Mako!" She punched the steering wheel and threw her suit jacket on as she exited the vehicle.

Satsuki stood in the doorway for a moment looking at Ryuko as she approached her and let out a quiet sigh as she turned, motioning for Ryuko to follow. Ryuko hesitated just long enough before following Satsuki up the marble staircase that when she looked up, she was staring directly at Satsuki's rear. That combined with the sound of those damned heels on the hard floor had Ryuko sweating and she removed her suit jacket, tossing it over her shoulder as she walked in Satsuki's wake. They entered a small study off the west wing of the building and Satsuki sat in a handsome brown leather chair behind the desk. Ryuko stood just inside the room, turning slowly on the spot, admiring what was probably the largest collection of books she had ever seen. The room was completely lined with bookcases absolutely crammed to capacity. Some had books lying horizontally atop the vertical ones. Satsuki intensely studied Ryuko, changing the blank expression on her face, to one of impatience as Ryuko faced her again.

"Sit down Matoi," she barked and when Ryuko jolted forward to sit, she added, "please. Please sit down." Ryuko just blinked at Satsuki, a million different thoughts flying through her head. A kind faced older man entered the study and placed a cup of tea in front of each of them on the desk. He offered Ryuko cream and sugar, but she nervously declined them, having no intention of even touching the beverage. Satsuki took a sip and Ryuko studied the curvature of her bottom lip as she did so. When she placed the cup back onto the saucer, she looked directly at Ryuko, causing her to insides to squirm.

"Y-you uhhh, wanted to discuss some things, Lady Satsuki?" Ryuko swallowed hard after the name fell awkwardly out of her mouth.

"I believe there are a few questions of yours that I never answered. Yes, I could allow more than four hours to pass between pointing out your behaviors I find unacceptable. No, it would not kill me to be nice to you, even more than once." Satsuki paused for a moment, taking another sip of her tea and seeming to prepare herself for the next words she was about to say. "I apologize. What can I do to make things more bearable for you? I understand that I am not an easy employer to work for." The gears in Ryuko's head ground to a halt so suddenly she was surprised Satsuki didn't hear it.

"For me?" Ryuko asked dumbly and Satsuki's brow knitted the way it usually did when she got impatient with Ryuko for answering a question with another question.

"I have had many personal assistants over the last few years and none of them have lasted more than a month. Furthermore, none of them had ever spoken to me the way you did that afternoon. I am not condoning your actions, however, I commend your honesty." She took another sip of her tea before locking eyes with Ryuko again. This time, Ryuko felt it when the floor fell out from underneath her.

"I, it's just," Ryuko was spluttering, losing track of her thoughts when Satsuki's eyebrow began to twitch. When she knew she was about to be reprimanded, her mind snapped back into overdrive and she found the words she was looking for. "Like I said that day. I don't care how you talk to me, or even don't talk to me, at the office. I understand the dynamic there and what you have going. That's a place of business and that's all that's done there, business. I actually like it that way too. What bothers me, is when we're at dinners or parties or whatever dumb swanky thing business people do to make themselves feel more important," Satsuki's eyebrows shot up at this "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that."

"No, you're absolutely correct. Go on," Satsuki spoke softly, a hint of amusement on her face that threw Ryuko off balance again.

"Er-right. Well when we're out at those events and especially when we have down time on trips, I just wish you'd actually treat me like a person and not a…glorified calendar." In an attempt to hide the color that had began to bloom across her cheeks at the soft way Satsuki looked at her, she took a large gulp of the tea that had been sitting in front of her.

"Very well Matoi," her expression hardened once again. "There is something else I must discuss with you. In the future, do not respond to any correspondence you receive from Sanageyama."

"Why?" Ryuko had somehow completely forgotten that she was speaking to Satsuki, her boss, not a friend. Surprisingly, and wildly out of character, Satsuki did not harshly tell Ryuko that it was none of her business. She sighed again and looked into her tea cup as she spoke, which afforded the opportunity for Ryuko to stare.

"Because he is one of very few people who exclusively contact me directly." Ryuko stopped staring at Satsuki and instead stared at the floor. Of course Satsuki's fiancé would contact her

directly. The only compensation for the sting of being reminded of the fact that the woman she was becoming infatuated with was engaged, was remembering that she herself belonged to the group of few people who contacted Satsuki directly; of course not for the same reasons. When Ryuko looked back up at Satsuki the next logical question surfaced.

"Then who was I responding to?" Ryuko's stomach twisted into an uncomfortably tight knot as Satsuki actually smiled. Not one of those 'maybe that's a smile' twitches of her mouth, but an actual small satisfied smile.

"I'm glad to see you can catch on quickly. I can't be sure exactly who is sending them, but it is either Nui, Hououmaru, or my mother."

"Why?" Ryuko was getting lost very quickly.

"To make sure things are going according to plan. The arrangement will give me full control over REVOCS and Kiryuin Industries and my mother will break into the circle of old money families. It's another one of those…dumb things rich people to do to make themselves feel more important…is I suppose how you would put it." She looked directly at Ryuko again, almost begging her to ask what she knew Ryuko would have picked up.

"Arrangement?" Ryuko almost died when Satsuki smiled at her again, a fire in those icy blue eyes and Ryuko was consumed by it.

"I will handle any further such correspondences," she said cooly, gracefully dodging the question. "One more thing before you leave. I noticed you've began planning the Paris meeting with Area 17 for relatively soon. Push it back to correspond with spring fashion week in March. We will need to accompany Iori anyway and I do not wish to waste time traveling unnecessarily."

Ryuko was lightheaded when she stood but somehow made it out of the room somewhat gracefully. She had to turn around and push her weight against the front door to close it and she caught a glimpse of Satsuki, standing at the top of the staircase watching her leave.

Whatever warnings she received from Mako that night about not letting her feelings run out of control fell on deaf ears. The nearly six months that passed between the conversation in Satsuki's study and the now rapidly approaching Paris trip were crammed full of parties, fund raisers, and other social gatherings that had it not been for Satsuki's change in behavior towards Ryuko, would have been unbearable. As it was, these gatherings became Ryuko's favorite part of her job. During the first one they attended after the night in Satsuki's study, Ryuko had the sneaking suspicion that Satsuki had no idea how to socially interact with her. Ryuko took it upon herself to break the ice after an hour of, although not the same cold and unapproachable silence as before, uncomfortably awkward silence. Satsuki had finished talking to a man with an unfortunately large nose who constantly chewed on an unlit cigar and when she turned to hand Ryuko his business card, Ryuko asked who he was.

"He has been trying to buy out REVOCS for years. He gives me his card every year insisting he'll make me an offer I can't refuse." Ryuko laughed as she slipped the card into her jacket pocket.

"Who does he think he is? The Godfather?" Ryuko snickered at her own joke but Satsuki just stared blankly. "You've never seen that movie?!" Ryuko explained the basic plot and when she finished elaborating the details that Satsuki would need to understand the joke, Satsuki smiled. They spent the rest of the dinner talking like this and as the holiday season approached, it had become a bit of a sport for Ryuko to make Satsuki laugh. It was even easier when Ryuko discovered that Satsuki had almost the same level of contempt for these types of events and the types of people that attended them that she herself had. Ryuko had taken it too far during a Christmas party, commenting that the younger gentleman who had spent a good half an hour practically drooling over Satsuki was probably going to ask santa to leave her under his tree.

"That is quite enough out of you for the night," she half joked and it was the first time Ryuko had ever seen Satsuki truly blush.

"Don't tell me you liked him?!" Ryuko asked incredulously. At that, Satsuki actually snorted.

"Absolutely not. I have no interest in me-" she stopped and corrected herself quickly. "Those types of men. I wouldn't be available anyway." Ryuko did not miss the stutter and she did her best to keep a grin from sliding across her face.

"Because of your engagement? I got the impression that you have no interest in that either. Now I definitely have the impression you have no interest in that." Ryuko threw a pointed look that clearly told Satsuki she hadn't corrected herself in time.

"Nothing gets by you does it Matoi?" Satsuki smiled coyly before being pulled into a new conversation.

It was nearly time to leave the office on the Friday before the Paris trip when Ryuko received an e-mail from Iori, asking her to come see him. She looked up at Satsuki.

"I see it. Go ahead, I do not require anything else before we leave."

"Yes ma'am." Regardless of the friendly conversation that flowed between them at events, in the office, Ryuko was still expected to address Satsuki with the upmost respect. When she entered Iori's studio, she found him positively beaming at her.

"There's nothing I could do to convince you to walk for fashion week could I?" He asked and laughed at the horrified look on Ryuko's face. "I didn't think so, it's a shame that my best work will not be on the runway."

"What are you talking about?" She asked, hoping that he wouldn't actually try to bribe her into it somehow.

"Well we can't have you and Lady Satsuki in nothing but the best on this trip. Although to pull this off you're going to have to keep your streak hidden the entire time."

"Wait, you made me more suits? Why am I here? You have my measurements." She looked down at herself. "I didn't gain weight or anything." He laughed again.

"Relax Matoi. I just needed to see something before I pack everything up for you," he said as he grabbed a black bow tie. This, however, did not help Ryuko to relax. He tied it on her and stepped back to evaluate her.

"Please tell me it doesn't work. I don't know how to tie a bow tie."

"Au contraire ma chérie. C'est magnifique!" Ryuko didn't speak french, but it wasn't difficult to figure out what he said. He untied the bow tie and rolled a large mirror in front of her. "Welcome to bow tie tying 101."

It took Ryuko twenty minutes to learn to tie the knot properly but she was still nervous to have to do this for a week straight.

"I can't just wear a regular tie? What if I forget how to do this?" She asked as he began to pack up the large black garment bag for her.

"You'll be fine. It's not as difficult as it seems. Just remember to take your time adjusting, and for God's sake please use a mirror." He finished his work but looked very sternly at Ryuko. "Every suit that I am about to give you corresponds directly to Lady Satsuki's. They are labeled by day and event. Do not deviate. Not a single piece."

"Yes sir!"

Ryuko did her research on the flight times before leaving for this trip. It was another twelve hour flight so leaving Tokyo at five o'clock in the morning on Sunday would mean that they would land in Paris at ten o'clock in the morning the same day. When she checked the itinerary again, she saw that there were no events planned for Sunday, but she still wanted to be prepared for anything that might come up. She Stayed awake all night Saturday knowing she would fall asleep for the first half of the flight. It was a decision that proved helpful as they were invited to dinner by a long time associate of Ragyo's the day they arrived. Another good decision Ryuko had made was to bring extra suits along with her.

Monsieur Rémi Devereux was so excited to see Satsuki that he cut her off from introducing Ryuko. She subsequently sat quietly while they spoke in rapid french, the only things Ryuko could pick up were mentions of REVOCS and Raygo. After studying Ryuko for a moment he turned to Satsuki.

"Votre petite amie est très silence." Satsuki brought her napkin to her face, pretending to wipe something away to hide the color that crept into her cheeks. Ryuko had an uneasy feeling that he had just said something about her.

"Elle ne parle pas Français." She answered quietly and Ryuko knew they were talking about her. One of the few phrases she had learned before she left was 'Je ne parle pas Français' which was 'I don't speak French'.

"Ahh! Pardon! I did not know! All this time! Je suis tellement désolé mademoiselle! Is this your first time to Paris?" He asked Ryuko in English, which was the next best thing. She doubted he spoke any more Japanese than she did French.

"Yes sir, it is," she answered. He clapped his hands and smiled.

"And 'ow are you two enjoying the city of love so far?" It was Ryuko's turn to color, not sure if he was simply affectionally referring to his city by it's nickname, or implying something else.

"It's very nice. I like the atmosphere." Ryuko thought it sounded lame, but it was the only thing she could think to say.

"From what I understand you are 'ere for business. You two should return for pleasure one day, no?" He nudged Satsuki and wiggled his eyebrows causing both Satsuki and Ryuko to blush violently again.

"Elle est pas ma petite amie," she said quietly. He smacked his hand to his forehead.

"Mon Dieu! Je suis très désolé! Pardonnez-moi s'il vous plaît!"

"Monsieur Devereux, this is my assistant, Ryuko Matoi."

"Enchanté," he turned back to Satsuki and began speaking completely in French again, but the subject matter was clear.

After dinner, they walked in silence down Le Champs Elysees and stopped at the Arc de Triomphe, which sat in the center of a massive traffic circle. Ryuko hadn't completely lied in her answer to Monsieur Devereux about liking the atmosphere. Tokyo was a large city as well and she had lived there for years, but there was something about the city of Paris that Ryuko couldn't quite describe. Walking through Tokyo and New York, even when strolling to see the sights, always seemed rushed and anxious, but Paris had a comfortability that Ryuko enjoyed immensely.

"I've been in this city at least a hundred times, but I never get tired of the sights." Satsuki sighed as they sat down to rest for a moment. Ryuko's comfortability was replaced with nervousness.

"He thought we were…together, didn't he? That's what he meant by petite amie." Satsuki hummed in response gazing out over the circle. "Then he asked you if you were single right?" Satsuki hummed again. "What did you say?" It took Satsuki a moment to respond.

"I told him that I wasn't married," Ryuko stared at Satsuki expectantly and she obliged when

she saw the look on Ryuko's face. "Then he tried to convince me to elope with his grandson." Satsuki actually began laughing and Ryuko didn't understand. "His grandson is a farmer in the countryside," she clarified and Ryuko joined in laughing, her nerves calming at the sound of Satsuki laughing with her. When they stopped laughing, they both looked back out over the bustling evening traffic.

"What did you say to that?" Ryuko asked. Satsuki hummed thoughtfully before turning to answer, not speaking until they locked eyes.

"I told him I had slightly better prospects." Ryuko's breath hitched and her heartbeat raced into overdrive. They stared at each other for a long time before Satsuki checked her watch.

Ryuko was frantically trying to tie her bow tie before their first formal party and pulled too hard on one end when Satsuki knocked on her door.

"Are you ready? We have to leave," Satsuki called and Ryuko ran to the door to explain the situation, but it was abundantly clear once Satsuki saw her. She reached out and grabbed the tie as she entered the room and Ryuko froze. She held her breath watching, Satsuki's face as she worked and in an instant, it was over. Satsuki took a step back to admire Iori's work.

"He wasn't kidding when he said you'd look almost as good as me," she smiled slyly at Ryuko before reaching up to perfectly center the navy blue bow. Ryuko tried to come up with a witty response, but she was too mesmerized.

"Y-you look amazing," she stammered out when Satsuki looked at her questioningly. Ryuko was treated to another genuinely warm smile before being ushered out of her own room.

Ryuko was thankful that she didn't speak any French. It afforded her the opportunity to speak, almost privately, to Satsuki in Japanese as only few others at the parties were fluent enough to understand. Like most events at home, Ryuko spent her time making jokes about the people that spoke to Satsuki, but much to Ryuko's surprise, Satsuki laughed openly and easily at these events. Ryuko's favorite thing to do, once she determined the other party would not understand her, was to say something rude about whoever Satsuki was speaking to, right in the middle of the conversation, and watch them awkwardly laugh along with Satsuki. Ryuko was just about to do it again at a party on Wednesday night, when Satsuki locked arms with Ryuko and pulled her to her side, effectively silencing Ryuko before she could say anything damaging. She was shocked when the man she was about to insult asked her to repeat herself in very fluent Japanese. She quickly changed gears and complemented his outfit.

"Behave yourself, we're not at home," Satsuki hissed as they walked away from the man.

"Sorry, his greeting sucked. He sounded like he was just business fluent." Satsuki snorted at the term 'business fluent'. Ryuko moved to separate from Satsuki as another man approached, but Satsuki put her other hand over Ryuko's arm, keeping them linked.

It took a night or two to get used to for Ryuko, but parading around on Satsuki's arm seemed to be the new standard for the Parisian social events. They had just left a party on the Champ

de Mars, a massive landscaped park that stretched out below the Eiffel Tower.

"Do you think we'll have time to go up the tower before we leave tomorrow?" Ryuko asked and Satsuki laughed shortly.

"I keep forgetting this is your first time in Paris. It's overrated, but I suppose I can indulge your tourist fancies," she teased. They had to walk by it to get back to their hotel and like the first night at the Arc de Triomphe, they stopped to rest just under the massive structure.

"Oh, come on! How could you love that big arch thing but not this?" Ryuko asked as she went to stand directly underneath it. She nearly jumped out of her skin when Satsuki laced their fingers together and wrapped her arms around Ryuko's waist.

"I said going to the top was overrated. I never said I didn't love it." Ryuko pulled Satsuki's arms from around her. She jolted forward turning to face Satsuki, and for some reason, she was angry.

"What are you doing?!" Ryuko was shouting again. "Why are you doing this?! You know it'll never work!" Satsuki looked both confused and hurt. "Don't look at me like that! I'm the one who spent the last six months trying to deal with…with…" she was flailing her arm at Satsuki, trying to find the words. "You! And feelings! We're gonna get home, and in however long you're gonna marry rich boy...and where am I gonna be?!" Satsuki didn't have time to answer before Ryuko cut her off. "Oh fuck it."

"Mat-" but Satsuki didn't get to remind Ryuko to not use foul language for a third time because Ryuko was kissing her. Ryuko's senses were overwhelmed by Satsuki but she broke the kiss, before she let it deepen into something that would engulf her entirely, to walk away. Leaving the most beautiful and powerful woman in the world, speechless for the first time in her life, under the Eiffel Tower.

She tried to bite back the tears as she walked to the hotel. She should have listed to Mako, she shouldn't have things go so far. She was angry that she didn't see it coming. Not correcting that stupid old guy right away the first night, parading around like they were a couple at parties, genuinely laughing and enjoying Ryuko's company. It was all so far out of character for Satsuki. Most of all, she was angry that it could never be that way when they returned home. When she got to her room, she threw her suit jacket on the bed and sat in the chair facing the window in the dark. The Eiffel Tower stood in the distance and Ryuko suddenly felt sick. She pulled her knees to her chest and took deep breaths for a few minutes, tears welling up in her eyes again. There was a light knocking on the door, Ryuko didn't move. Another more forceful round of knocking.

"Ryuko. I know you're in there." Satsuki knocked again. "The concierge said you had returned." Ryuko let her feet fall back to the floor. "Ryuko…please open the door." Ryuko wasn't entirely sure why hearing Satsuki call her by her first name made her get up and open the door, but it did. They stared at each other and Satsuki broke the silence.

"God you look so good without the jacket," and they were kissing again. Ryuko had just enough time to unzip Satsuki's dress before they fell on the bed. This time, it was Satsuki that

stopped, and Ryuko understood. She got up and crossed the room to her luggage to retrieve the two large t-shirts she had brought for sleeping in, handing one to Satsuki before entering the bathroom to change. When she didn't hear any movement in the room, she exited, finding Satsuki already tucked under the covers. "Such a gentleman," Satsuki purred, nuzzling into Ryuko's neck. Ryuko hummed contentedly and fell asleep after several minutes of breathing in time with Satsuki.

Ryuko woke up to soft lips against her neck and when she opened her eyes, she found that they had managed to tangle themselves together in the night. Satsuki laughed quietly watching Ryuko wake up and take in her surroundings.

"If you really want to go up the tower, we should go now," Satsuki informed her and went to get out of bed but Ryuko pulled her back down on top of her.

"I'll take your word on it being overrated." Ryuko traced circles in the small of Satsuki's back as she stared out the window at the Eiffel Tower. To anybody else, this would have been heaven, but the last few moments she had with Satsuki like this were coming to an end like a freight train. She tucked her hands behind her head and hoped the sound of her heart sinking wasn't audible. The action cued Satsuki to get up again and the sight of her stretching wearing Ryuko's shirt made Ryuko's chest ache.

"Alright. I'll meet you downstairs in an hour," and she left to get ready for the last meeting of the trip.

The meeting with the Paris team of Area 17 was almost identical to the one in New York. When Ryuko introduced herself in English, it prompted the entire meeting to take place in English, but Ryuko still couldn't decipher Satsuki's vague answers. They boarded the jet in silence and Ryuko watched Paris and everything she wanted, shrink into nothingness. She turned up her music, loosing herself in Joey Ramone's singing as she fell asleep.

"They're tellin' us, they're gonna make a fuss, about the two of us. I want you around…"

Mako nearly had to physically beat Ryuko for details the night she returned. She had her fist pulled back in the air when Ryuko put her hands up and finally caved in.

"Please don't hit me! I'll tell you! I'll tell you! But Mako, I swear, both yours and my lives are done if this gets out." Ryuko fixed Mako with a serious look. Mako's eyes got wider and wider as Ryuko told her everything that happened and when she was finished, Mako punched Ryuko anyway. "What the hell was that for?!" Ryuko yelled, rubbing her arm.

"That was for being a fucking moron."

"Wha? How am I a moron?"

"Because I know you and I know you're going to spend the next however long until she has

to get married pining away for her and then it's just like you told her. She gets married and where does that leave you? It's gonna fucking crush you. When are you gonna learn to fucking listen to me when I talk to you?!" Ryuko looked at Mako apologetically, which softened the small angry woman. "You're impossible, but I fucking love you. I will be here for you when it happens, but I'm not throwing a sympathy fuck your way. Find a random for your rebound this time." Ryuko shoved Mako roughly.

"I know it was stupid. I shouldn't have done it. I know it's not gonna be easy, there's no way things will be like that now that we're home, but it was nice while it lasted. Things will go back to business Monday morning. I'll be ok, I've prepared myself."

"You'd better have. I don't wanna have to listen to you whine about during my lunch break again."

Things were exactly as Ryuko expected to be in the office, all business. What she was almost curious to find out, was how things would be at social events and the day came a week after they returned. An e-mail directly from Ragyo Kiryuin informed both Satsuki and Ryuko that their presence was mandatory for a dinner at the Kiryuin Manor that night. Ryuko felt it best to revert back to her original behavior of trailing just slightly behind Satsuki. When Satsuki turned abruptly to face Ryuko and hand her another business card, Ryuko forgot her intentions of keeping quiet.

"Ugh, I'm surprised this room can hold so many egos at once," she muttered and her heart jolted when Satsuki smiled briefly.

"Not here. The walls have ears in this house Matoi," Satsuki almost hissed in a tone that, Ryuko came to understand, was stern out of necessity.

"There you are! If I didn't know any better," a man with slicked back green hair and a menacing grin wrapped an arm around Satsuki's waist and pulled her, almost roughly, to him. "I'd say you were avoiding me sweetheart." The tone in his voice suggested that he did know better. Ryuko could not help the anger that exploded inside her, there was no mistaking who this man was. "Sanageyama Uzu. You must be Matoi Ryuko. I've heard you're the only assistant who's been able to deal with Lady Satsuki's icy behavior." The stab was meant for Satsuki, but hit Ryuko in a way that made her stomach turn, especially when Satsuki ran her hand down his chest.

"You seem to deal with it just fine darling." She said, throwing an almost apologetic look quickly in Ryuko's direction before Sanageyama pulled her along into the dining room.

Ryuko had the seat directly across the table from him and she took every chance she could to glare at him, until Satsuki caught her. After being caught, Ryuko paid an unorthodox amount of attention to her tofu with crab sauce and tried to remain as unnoticed as possible. Halfway through the main course, she glanced up at Satsuki, who was watching her. Ryuko smiled slightly and returned to her meal. During dessert, when Satsuki was asked by another guest how the Paris trip went, she stared at Satsuki the entire time. Satsuki was talking about how amazing Iori's work was when Ryuko noticed Sanageyama staring her down. Not one to back down from a challenge, Ryuko fixed him with a look of her own and they stayed locked like

this until Satsuki noticed again.

"Matoi, wouldn't you say Mr. Shiro's work was excellent?" Satsuki asked, snapping Ryuko out of her silent battle.

"It was absolutely superb, ma'am. Perfect to the last thread," and she looked back at Sanageyma. "Down to our own outfits matching precisely." A satisfied grin spread across her face as anger flared in his eyes.

Ryuko was dismissed from Satsuki by Raygo Kiryuin to discuss private matters after dinner. Guests were mingling again, sipping champagne, all engaged in a massive pissing contest of who's more important than who. Ryuko was waiting for it, and when Sanageyama cornered her, she was ready.

"Do you have any idea who I am, Matoi?" He asked harshly.

"I know exactly who you are, Sanageyama," and she glanced in Satsuki's direction. He picked up the subtle action and seemed to recognize from her own tone, that he would not be able to bully Ryuko easily.

"So it seems you do. What happened in Paris?" His tone drastically changed to genuine concern, which confused Ryuko.

"The first night we had dinner with-" she began but he cut her off.

"No. Did anything happen in Paris?" He worded the question differently enough that Ryuko understood and her stomach hit the floor.

"No," she lied, making sure to not break eye contact as he watched her carefully.

"I'm not stupid. I saw the way you look at her. She hasn't been the same since she returned." Ryuko swallowed hard, stealing herself for what she knew she would have to say to get herself out of this without making a horrible mess for Satsuki.

"I apologize. You're right. I do have some unprofessional feelings towards Lady Satsuki. I assure you, I will not be a problem. You are an extremely lucky man Sanageyama," as sick as it made her to do it, she gave him a short bow. He seemed to take a moment before deciding that she was being sincere.

"Glad to see you know your place." Ryuko seriously contemplated punching him in the face right there.

"Matoi. I will not need you any longer this evening. You may leave." Satsuki had appeared out of nowhere causing both Ryuko and Sanageyama to jump.

"Yes, ma'am. Good night sir," but she didn't turn around fast enough to be spared witnessing Sanageyama pulling Satsuki into a kiss.

Ryuko was surprised that Satsuki didn't call her to her mansion to talk about what happened at the dinner. In fact, they spoke very little in the following months as spring turned to summer. Satsuki had been declining all invitations again and Ryuko didn't dare try to talk to Satsuki at the office. Ryuko filled her own calendar with a slew of shows and nights of drinking with Mako to keep her mind off of Satsuki. The only problem was, when she got too drunk, she tended to talk endlessly about Satsuki. One night, Mako had smacked her across the face in order to get her to stop. It was on the eve of Ryuko's birthday that Satsuki stopped Ryuko before she left the office.

"Matoi. Do you have any plans this evening?" Ryuko was thrown off guard by the personal nature of the question.

"No, ma'am." Honestly, she did have plans. She was going out for an epic bar crawl with Mako ending at their favorite bar for when the clock struck midnight, they did this every year.

"Would you accompany me to dinner?" Ryuko pulled out her work phone to check if she had missed something. "This is not…" Satsuki began but stopped. "Ryuko…I'd like to take you out to dinner," she said quietly.

"Sounds great," and she grinned at Satsuki, who smiled softly in return.

Satsuki laid her hand gently on Ryuko's shoulder when they reached the parking garage.

"You can ride with me if you want," Satsuki offered. Ryuko looked at her car for a moment. "It will be safe. I will return you to it this evening." Ryuko nodded and the black town car that always drove Satsuki everywhere pulled up. Ryuko looked back sadly at her car as they began to pull out and caught the signature blonde pigtails of Nui the secretary whipping out of sight behind a column.

When they arrived at Satsuki's mansion, Iori was waiting for them. He immediately pulled Ryuko into, what she now understood, was his personal studio.

"I feel like this was all planned," she said trying to pry information out of him as he disappeared into the next room.

"Happy early birthday Matoi," he said emerging with a new suit for her. "This isn't my gift to you. Change so I can see you in it." She did as she was told and returned to him. He regarded her for a long moment before instructing her to send Lady Satsuki in. She stood in the entry hall admiring the new suit she was in. All black with a red vest. No tie and no jacket tonight. After a few minutes, she remembered to call Mako to tell her they'd have to re-schedule the bar crawl for the next night.

"What?! Why?! We do it every year!! It's tradition! You can't just break tradition shit head!" Mako yelled.

"Satsuki asked me to dinner and I'm pretty sure this was all planned."

"Wait. *She* asked you out to dinner? And you think it was planned?" Mako asked in disbelief.

"Yeah. Iori was waiting for us when we got to the mansion."

"*She* asked you out to dinner?"

"Yeah, did I stutter ass face?"

"Wow…ok, so she's not as much of a twat as I thought she was. Doesn't mean I'm not gonna tell you for the millionth time to not get all head over heels."

"Did-did she just get your blessing?" Ryuko laughed.

"Oh hell no! She's got a long way to go for that. I'm gonna have to sit her down and have-"

"Mako, I gotta go. I'll see you tomorrow," and Ryuko hung up on Mako as Iori cleared his throat announcing his presence.

"Matoi, this is my gift to you," he said stepping to the side, revealing Satsuki, in a floor length, strapless, corset top red dress with a slit at the thigh. Satsuki crossed the entrance hall to Ryuko, whose brain did not have enough time to catch up registering how stunningly beautiful she looked before Satsuki left a soft kiss on her cheek.

"Holy shit. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on." Ryuko smacked her hand to her mouth realizing she had sworn in front of Satsuki.

"I think I'll let that one slide," she said playfully. "You look quite stunning yourself…except," she reached out and ran her hand through Ryuko's hair, causing the signature red streak to fall out; and every other hair on Ryuko to stand straight up. "That's better. Ready?" Ryuko offered her arm to Satsuki, and she took it as they left.

Satsuki took Ryuko to a big band dinner club, complete with candles on the tables and waiters in white coats with white gloves. Ryuko did nothing but stare at Satsuki the entire time from the moment they sat down.

"If you don't blink soon, your eyes are going to dry out of your skull," Satsuki teased.

"You're just too good to be true. Can't take my eyes off of you," Ryuko started singing along with the with the band.

"Stop that. Don't you dare." Satsuki said as Ryuko took a deep breath and threw her head back.

"I LOVE YOU BABY! AND IF IT'S QUITE ALRIGHT I NEED YOU-"

"Stop!" Satsuki threw her napkin at Ryuko who laughed loudly. "I didn't know you liked this

type of music, judging by the horrible noise that comes from your car."

"Oh come on! Who doesn't love Frankie Valli? And there's a lot about me you don't know." Ryuko cursed at herself for that as Satsuki looked down at her silverware. "I just mean we haven't really gotten to know each other all that well. Well, I kinda. What I mean is…"

"I know your general personality, but I know very little about you. You're right." Satsuki finished for her.

"Yeah, so like, ask me some questions or something. You're not very good at getting to know people are you?" Ryuko laughed nervously.

"You're too good at reading people." Satsuki narrowed her eyes.

"Sorry. My best friend is like that. It drives me nuts sometimes. So come on. It's easy. What's your favorite kind of music? This?"

They spent the entire dinner talking and laughing when they found that they were just about as opposite as was possible. Big band was, in fact, Satsuki's favorite music, Ryuko's was punk. Satsuki preferred tea, cats, was an early bird, and her ideal night was a quiet night at home with a good book. Ryuko, on the other hand, preferred coffee, dogs, was a night owl, and her ideal night was either going out to a show or to the retro arcade in Decks on Odiaba Island. The only thing it seemed they had in common, was that they both had an intense love for things from decades long passed.

They arrived back in the garage at the office around ten o'clock and Ryuko leaned casually over the back passenger side window so say her farewells to Satsuki.

"You really are irresistible in those suits with just the vest," Satsuki said looking at Ryuko, desire smoldering in her eyes. Ryuko swiftly leaned foreword and kissed Satsuki, who pulled back quickly. "Happy Birthday Ryuko," and she rolled the window up. Ryuko hopped in her car and called Mako. There was still time to meet up at their favorite spot and she tore out of the garage as another black town car turned in.

Raygo Kiryuin stepped out of her own vehicle and into the seat that Ryuko had just vacated. Satsuki stared straight ahead waiting for whatever her mother had to say.

"Do I need to remind you that you are getting married in less than six months?" Her voice was deadly cold.

"No, mother. I am well aware of the arrangement." Satsuki spat the last word with as much venom as she could.

"Then perhaps I need to remind you that galavanting around with your assistant is unacceptable behavior?"

"We weren't galavanting around mother," Satsuki knew she was caught, she wanted to know just how much her mother knew.

"Did you think whispers wouldn't follow you back from Paris? I had people calling me asking if the wedding was called off. Nui saw her leave with you this evening. How many other people do you think saw you two? Where did you go?"

"So I took my assistant to dinner for her birthday. Forgive me if I treat my assistant like a human being."

"You will marry Sanageyama. You will not embarrass me any further by running around with that low-class underling. Is that clear?"

"Yes mother." Raygo got out of the car and back into her own leaving Satsuki to fight back tears. Something that she hadn't done in a very long time.

Ryuko knew something was wrong the very next day. Satsuki began communicating exclusively through e-mail again, including to send Ryuko to lunch and home. She also suddenly no longer left at the same time as Ryuko like she had every day since Ryuko began working for her. The fund raiser that they attended a few weeks later was back to the way things were as well. Satsuki did not respond when Ryuko asked who the man in the awful floral patterned suit she had been speaking with was. Satsuki also did not respond when she made a comment about the horrible suit anyway. She didn't look at Ryuko once the entire night and didn't even say good night when they parted ways. It wasn't for another two weeks that Ryuko had a chance to try and ask Satsuki what the hell had happened. After a month of leaving the office separately from Ryuko, this particular Friday, they left together. In the elevator, Ryuko glanced at Satsuki and smiled, but Satsuki just stared coldly at the doors in front of them. When they got to the garage and Satsuki did not bid Ryuko a good evening, she had had enough.

"Alright. That's it. Let's go." She grabbed Satsuki by the wrist and dragged her to her Camaro.

"What do you think you are doing?! Let go of me this instant Matoi!" Satsuki shouted at her.

"No. Get in the car." Satsuki stared angrily at Ryuko who stared angrily right back. "Get in the car Kiryuin." Ryuko was sure she was going to get smacked for that but she didn't care. She kept her hold on Satsuki's wrist until she was in the passenger's seat. Ryuko ran to the driver's seat and shoved her key roughly into the ignition. The engine roared to life and Ryuko slammed her foot down on the gas pedal, nearly crashing into traffic to get away from the office.

"Ok, what the fuck is going on?" Ryuko demanded.

"Matoi, if I need to remind you again to not use foul language when you speak to me I will fire you."

"Look around you Satsuki! We're not at the office any more! We're way past a professional

relationship. Shit, we're way past a platonic relationship!" When Satsuki did not respond for several moments, Ryuko punched the power button on the stereo and Joey Ramone's voice poured into the space.

"...You know if it comes true, I'll be so good to you. I'll never treat you cruel, as long as I've got you around. I want you around. I want you around. You heard that I'm no good. Yeah, yeah, I'm no good, but I'll treat you like I should. I want you around..."

Ryuko drove until she reached the edge of Rainbow bridge that connected Tokyo to Odiaba Island. She hadn't originally planned on stopping, but then again she hadn't planned on them not speaking. She turned the stereo off and turned to Satsuki.

"Look, I just…I don't know why you've gone back to treating me like shit and it's killing me." Satsuki stared out the window for a moment before she finally looked at Ryuko.

"Ryuko…what are you doing? Why are you doing this? You know it will never work," she said quietly, knowing that Ryuko would understand. It was very fortunate that Ryuko had stopped driving because the realization hit her so hard she would have driven off the side of the bridge. Satsuki saw her put the pieces together like she knew she would. It was exactly what Ryuko said to her in Paris. She watched as Ryuko answered the questions in her head and reached the conclusion that it was the same answer Satsuki would have given had Ryuko let her respond. Then just as the shock hit her, Satsuki pulled Ryuko into a kiss that had the same electricity as the night under the Eiffel Tower. Ryuko rested her forehead against Satsuki's and took a deep breath.

"Because I…want you and I don't care," she said just as quietly. Satsuki hummed and kissed Ryuko again before replying.

"Sounds about like what I was going to say. Where are we going?" Ryuko grinned.

"We're going to have fun."

"Matoi." Satsuki glared at her as she restarted the car.

"What did I tell you about that shit?! We're not at the office."

"What did I tell you about foul language?" Ryuko laughed suddenly.

"You're gonna have a heart attack if you ever meet Mako."

When they arrived at their destination, Ryuko left her suit jacket in the car in favor of her biker jacket. Decks was a massive shopping mall that had unique stores, restaurants, a wax museum, and a few indoor theme parks. Ryuko's favorite, of course, was the retro 1980's style arcade complete with pinball machines and even the old table top games like frogger and pac man. They started in the arcade where Ryuko dominated Satsuki at Street Fighter but then let Satsuki win the last two rounds they played. Then Ryuko showed off her exceptional pinball skills while Satsuki watched, absolutely fascinated. They were leaving the arcade as Ryuko wrapped her arm around Satsuki's waist, grinning from ear to ear when Satsuki looked

at her.

"What do you wanna do next? There's like a million cool things. Have you ever been to the wax museum? It's super creepy!"

"How is a museum dedicated to wax disturbing?" Satsuki asked and Ryuko laughed.

"Come on. You'll see."

Madame Tussauds wax museum was full of wax statues of famous people and, but contrary to what Ryuko expected, Satsuki was transfixed at how lifelike the statues were. She was standing almost nose to nose with a wax replica of Michael Jackson, waving her hand in front of its face.

"I almost expect them to start moving," she mused as they made their way through the exhibits. Ryuko caught a glimpse of Satsuki shivering and removed her biker jacket, draping it over Satsuki's shoulders. "Must they keep it so cold in here?" Ryuko snorted.

"Yeah. It is a wax museum. Imagine how freaky it would be if Johnny Depp's face started melting." Satsuki's face was nothing short of horrified at the thought, causing Ryuko to laugh.

"I'm a little concerned you find that funny," Satsuki teased and Ryuko laughed louder.

"Not that, the look on your face though. Priceless." She grabbed Satsuki's hand and they left the museum to stroll up and down the boardwalk that connected Decks to the adjacent Aqua City. When they turned around to return to Decks for dinner, Ryuko almost ran straight into Mako.

"What are you doing here?! Wait. How long have you been following me?" Ryuko asked narrowing her eyes.

"You're not the only one who likes to come here to blow off some steam and I was so not following you," but the uncharacteristic coloring of her face gave her away.

"Mako! How long?!" Ryuko demanded.

"Ok, ok. Since you guys left the arcade." Mako mumbled the response.

"How the hell did I not see you?" The fact that they had gone through the entire museum and walked up the boardwalk without seeing Mako wasn't entirely a shock. Mako was very small and could easily remain unseen if she wanted.

"I don't know, maybe because you're stupid. I'm Mako by the way, since Ryuko is too dumb to introduce anybody." Mako held her hand out to Satsuki who had been watching the entire exchange with the same horrified expression on her face as she had in the museum.

"Lady Satsuki kinda has an aversion to foul language," Ryuko explained when it took a moment for Satsuki to shake Mako's hand.

"It's a…pleasure to meet you." Satsuki said, clearly trying to fight the urge to scold Mako for her foul language.

"Yeah, you're gonna have to get over that shit if you're gonna be fucking my best friend." Ryuko coughed and Satsuki looked incredibly offended.

"Seriously Mako?!" Ryuko yelled and looked apologetically at Satsuki.

"What?! It's true. Following your ass has me starving. Wanna go get some dinner?" Mako stuck her thumb out behind her pointing back to the shopping center they had come from.

"Uhhhh, actually, I was kinda hoping-" Ryuko started, but Satsuki cut her off.

"We'd love to."

"Woah, she's wearing the pants already! Man up shit head!" Mako punched Ryuko in the arm as they all began to walk back to Decks.

They got a table at Mako and Ryuko's favorite restaurant and Satsuki stared at the menu for a long time.

"Is there anything served in this establishment that will not cause me to instantly have a heart attack?" She asked and Mako snickered. Ryuko leaned over a little more than necessary to block Satsuki's view and pretended to read the menu. The restaurant was a burger and shake place where the only thing that ever changed about Ryuko and Mako's orders were their milkshake flavors.

"Mmmmm, nope," and Ryuko kissed Satsuki on the cheek making her blush softly at the public display of affection. Satsuki looked apologetically at Mako who snickered again. "Just get a good old fashioned cheese burger and a shake. It was really nice knowing you." Satsuki turned and looked at Ryuko with a halfhearted look of shock and hurt on her face. Ryuko grinned before steeling a quick kiss.

"God, I haven't even eaten yet and you guys are gonna make me hurl." Mako groaned. The waitress came by to take their order and Ryuko cut Satsuki off before she could ask the waitress for more time to decide what to order.

"3 cheese burgers and fries. I'll have a vanilla malt shake, she'll have a…strawberry shake and," she pointed at Mako who chimed in with her shake order.

"I'll have a chocolate banana shake!" The waitress nodded and left to put in their order. While they waited for their food, Mako and Ryuko chatted away about their respective weeks and talked about possible weekend plans. Satsuki, who had never had a platonic relationship that in any way, shape, or form resembled that of the two women with her, was fascinated by their interaction. When their food came, Satsuki spent a long time staring at her plate.

"Please don't make me eat this," she pleaded when Ryuko nudged her plate closer to her.

"Just pick it up and put it in your mouth. You'll love it. Trust me. Best burgers around." Both Mako and Ryuko watched Satsuki take a tenuous first bite. She slowly chewed before looking at Ryuko in surprise.

"That is horrifyingly delicious." Mako and Ryuko laughed and continued eating their burgers. When they all finished their burgers, Ryuko dipped a french fry in her shake and held it up to Satsuki's mouth.

"I refuse to eat that. Ryuko, stop. I will not put that in my mouth," Satsuki was trying to squirm away from the fry, but Ryuko managed to get it in her mouth as she continued to protest. Mako was staring at the two of them as Ryuko laughed, Satsuki clearly did not find the fry as delicious as the burger.

"Are you two for real?" She asked.

"What?" Ryuko turned her attention away from Satsuki long enough for her to shove a strawberry shake coated fry into Ryuko's mouth and it was Ryuko's turn to look displeased. "I hate strawberry."

"Then why did you order me a strawberry milkshake?" Satsuki asked, still smiling at her successful attack.

"Because, as we discovered at my birthday dinner, you tend to like the opposite of everything I do. I hate strawberry, so I would put money down that you like it." Satsuki was genuinely impressed by her logic and took a sip of her milkshake.

"You two are fucking disgustingly cute. Stop it." Mako was shaking her head as she pinched the bridge of her nose.

They said good night to Mako before they made their way back to Ryuko's car. Ryuko had her music blasting again so they did not speak during the drive home, but Satsuki held Ryuko's hand the whole way back to Satsuki's mansion. Ryuko turned the car off and leaned over to Kiss Satsuki good night. They broke apart when both their phones went off, indicating a high priority e-mail. They both checked them at the same time and Ryuko's heart broke and blood boiled simultaneously.

From: <SanageyamaUzu@dojomasters.net>
To: <MatoiRyuko@KI.com>
Cc: <KiryuinSatsuki@KI.com>
Subject: <No Subject>

Please remind Lady Satsuki that there is only a month left to get fitted for her dress.

Sanageyama Uzu
Chief Executive Officer
Dojo Masters Inc.

Tokyo, Japan

"Nui must have seen us." Satsuki said in a dismissive tone, but receiving the e-mail was not what had Ryuko in the state she was. "Relax, it's not really from him. I'm certain that one came from my mother."

"Relax?! Satsuki…when were you going to tell me this was happening in a month?! I thought I'd have more time." Ryuko couldn't look at Satsuki for the tears that had sprang up suddenly.

"Time for what?" Satsuki asked and the nonchalant tone she used made Ryuko even angrier.

"Time for this! To somehow…I don't know! Why would you keep doing this when you knew there was only a month left?!" Ryuko had began shouting in an attempt to stem the tears that now flowed down her face.

"You're the one that kidnapped me. How was I supposed to know you were going to pull some grand stunt? This isn't my fault." Ryuko's mouth fell open in shock that she was blaming this on her.

"You could have said something. Oh, hey, before we start this, *again*, that wedding that crushes all your hopes and dreams, yeah, that's NEXT FUCKING MONTH!" Satsuki reached her breaking point and got out of the car, slamming the door and disappearing into her house. "FUCK!" Ryuko yelled and sped out of the driveway, gravel flying in her wake.

Ryuko had little time to nurse her wounds, which only prolonged the amount of time she spent being angry. The only way this benefitted Ryuko was that it was no surprise that everything was back to the cold, unapproachable business Satsuki the very next day and Ryuko didn't care. In fact, Ryuko almost preferred it. She was angrily planning a three day trip to Paris to meet with Area 17 the week after the fight and Paris was the last place Ryuko wanted to be with Satsuki. She was almost relieved when Satsuki sent her an e-mail instructing her to cancel the trip and inform Area 17 that it would be an indeterminate amount of time before she would be requiring their services. It seemed strange Satsuki would just scrap a project that she had clearly put a lot of time and effort into, but Ryuko did her best to tell herself not to care. That Friday, upon being dismissed from her day's work, Ryuko silently dropped her letter of resignation on Nui's desk and tore out of the garage for the last time.

"You did WHAT?!" Mako shouted, more out of shock than anger when Ryuko told that she had quit her job. Mako was sitting on the edge of Ryuko's bed running her hand soothingly through Ryuko's hair. Ryuko was curled up in the fetal position, sobbing.

"I don't want to look at her anymore! I don't want anything to do with her! She can go marry that asshole and have a nice fucking life! I don't care if I ever see her again!" Ryuko threw a pillow across the room.

"But sweetie, you do care. You care so much it's tearing you up. Ryuko, look at me. You two are the most disgustingly perfect couple I've ever fucking seen." Ryuko curled into the tightest ball she could possibly could.

"Why are you defending her?! I thought you fucking hated her?! Who's side are you on?!" Ryuko shouted through fresh sobs.

"I'm not defending anybody. I'm on your side. I did hate her, until I saw you guys together. Remember that night we were at the bar and we saw those chicks with the matching mohawks and you asked why you couldn't find a love like that?" Ryuko nodded weakly. "Shit head! She's your mohawk woman! Remember how when you looked at them, you just knew they were perfect and in love and shit?" Ryuko looked up at Mako. "That's what it was like watching you two." Ryuko stared at the wall for a moment.

"It doesn't matter anymore," she sighed, resigning herself to the crushing sadness that had been pulling at her all week.

"What do you fucking mean it doesn't matter! Of course it fucking matters!" Mako was shaking her.

"All I can do is accept it and move on," she said quietly.

"You could search for a lifetime and never find this again!"

"What other option do I have Mako?! Really?" Ryuko was starting to get angry at Mako.

"You stop that fucking wedding." Mako was deadly serious.

They spent the weekend doing their homework. As with most high society weddings, the date and location were all included in wedding announcement that was made to the public. To refine the plan, Ryuko had to enlist the help of the only other person on the planet who really knew about Ryuko and Satsuki.

"Iori, I need a favor."

"Matoi, why do you think I'd help you?" Ryuko didn't want to have to take the cheep shot, but she needed him too badly for the plan.

"Because I wasn't the only one fraternizing with Kiryuin Industries higher ups."

"How did you-"

"Oh come on Iori. Inumuta was always on your floor and the man clearly knows nothing about fashion. Besides, I know you've been rooting for me all along." She heard him sigh.

"Very well. I'll arrange to work from home tomorrow. Come by in the afternoon and we'll talk. Have somebody drop you off and available to pick you up. We can't have your car sitting anywhere on the property"

"Wait…where do you live?"

"Matoi."

"Right."

She had Mako drop her off and wait for her to call to pick her up.

"What do you require from me?" He asked when she was quickly ushered into his studio.

"I need a tux…but not just any tux."

"What did you have in mind?" He asked genuinely curious.

"Listen to this." She pulled out her phone and played several songs for him.

"Interesting, a punk rock tuxedo." He said halfway through the second song grabbing a blank sheet of paper and began sketching a design. "It shouldn't be very difficult. It's very fitting." His phone rang and he put his finger to his mouth indicating for Ryuko to stay quiet before he answered. Ryuko could tell by the conversation that she needed to get out of there quickly and left before he hung up. Satsuki closed the front door as he tucked Ryuko's tuxedo design under a pile of random papers.

"Iori, let's get this over with." Satsuki said as she entered the room.

"Yes ma'am." A long silence stretched before he broke it again. "May I speak freely Lady Satsuki?" He asked, a measure of caution in his voice.

"When have I ever not valued your candor Iori?" She answered softly.

"You could stop this." He said, matter-of-factly, and Satsuki tensed.

"There are reasons, that you know very well of, why I cannot do that." Her tone was suddenly cold.

"You'll never be happy with Sanageyama."

"It was never about being happy. It doesn't matter," she replied, in a sad hollow voice.

"It doesn't? Or it *didn't* until you fell in-"

"That's enough, Iori." She stopped him before he could say anymore on the subject and he finished fitting the wedding dress in silence.

The plan its self was fairly simple, but the only thing Ryuko couldn't figure out was what exactly to say. Mako's advice, while it made her laugh, was not helpful, because she wasn't going to "bust up in there and yell 'hey dick wad, back off of my bitch'". Iori put her mind at

ease about some doubts she was starting to have, but didn't help when it came to figuring out what to say. His advise was still better than Mako's.

"What if she doesn't come with me? She doesn't really have any reason to." She asked him when she went to pick up the finished tuxedo.

"Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît pas."

"What?" She stared at him as he sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing. It's a quote from a Frenchman named-"

"That's not any clearer, in plain English." He massaged a temple as he searched for a more straightforward way to answer her without betraying Satsuki's confidence in him.

"If the situation were reversed, would you go with her?"

"Well, yeah, but I don't know everything about-"

"Matoi, just do it." They stared at each other for a moment and she nodded stiffly.

"Wait! What do I say?" She yelled as he turned to leave.

"Just tell her how you feel," and he was gone. She left muttering that that wasn't any more helpful.

It took Ryuko a long time to fall asleep the night before and when she did, she kept having nightmares about running down an aisle that stretched endlessly, never reaching her destination. She woke up to Mako pounding on the front door, screaming that they were going to be late. She dashed to the front door and wrenched it open, not even greeting Mako before she flew back into her room to get dressed. How could she have overslept? Even a minute late was too late and she didn't even bother to tie her tie as they flew out of the apartment.

Satsuki was deaf to the gasps and whispers of how beautiful she looked as she walked alone down the aisle. She took her place across from Sanageyama and forced herself to hold her head up. Her eyes darted to the guests as they took their seats. The smug satisfied look on her mothers face. The hulking Gamagori sitting next to the tiny Jakuzure, both with solemn expressions. Inumuta on his tablet as always but strangely, Iori not trying to get him to put it down. He was paying too much attention to his own phone.

Ryuko was swerving and weaving through traffic as Iori's text message told her that the ceremony had began. She swore loudly and punched the stereo to life, cranking the volume, for the first time since she had it installed, to full blast. She had lost Mako, who was supposed to be following her, a few miles back, but there was no time to stop. According to the plan, she and Mako were already supposed to be at the church, waiting just outside for his next signal.

The ceremony dragged on for what seemed like an eternity and Satsuki's attention was brought back to the minister when she was directed to repeat after him. Hollow empty words fell from her lips and in the middle of her speaking, she thought of Ryuko. The barrier of apathy she had spent the last week constructing, suddenly smashed as the tune of a song she once heard in Ryuko's car drifted through her thoughts. She took a deep breath, hoping to clear her mind and concentrate on getting through the rest of the ceremony, but the music grew louder. Some of the guests started to look around as Satsuki realized the music was not in her head. In spite of the disturbance, the priest continued, and by the time the moment Satsuki was dreading most came around, the music was clearly echoing through the space. She looked at Iori, who hastily arranged his face into a blank expression from the grin she had caught him wearing when he looked back up from his phone again.

"If anyone can show just cause why this couple cannot lawfully be joined together in matrimony, let them speak now or forever hold their peace." The doors in the back of the sanctuary flew open.

Ryuko knew she had not a second to spare when she pulled up to the church, Iori's call had already gone to voicemail. She didn't bother to turn her music down or turn the car off as she ran up the church steps. Mako came flying in behind her as she pulled open the front door and had to shove a security guard out of the way. Mako headed off the second guard as Ryuko flung open both doors to the sanctuary and marched in.

"I don't know of any just cause, but holding peace is not something I'm very good at," she said as she walked down the aisle, tying her tie in the process. She tucked the red plaid patterned silk into her vest and straightened the heavily patched jacket as she approached Satsuki. "I guess I made it just in time," and she grinned at Satsuki's look of disbelief.

"DO IT RYUKO!" Every head turned as Mako fell through the doors, having finally been tackled by the security guards. Ryuko gave Mako a thumbs up before turning back to Satsuki.

"I love you and I don't care. That's what I meant to say. I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life making fun of rich people at business parties with you and making you eat things that will give you a heart attack and going to big band dinners and even staying in and reading a book and we can get a cat if you really want and I'll wake up early on the weekends with you but please…please don't do this. I can't spend the rest of my life knowing I had you right in front of me and I let you go."

Nobody breathed after Ryuko's speech and when the song that was playing from her car stereo ended, Sanageyama began to slowly clap.

"How touching, now if you'd be so kind as to let the adults finish," he shoved Ryuko and she reacted without thinking. She pulled her fist back, and with every ounce of strength she possessed, buried it into his jaw, knocking him to the ground. Ryuko smirked, satisfied at the look of shock on his face as he went to get up, but stayed down when Ryuko pulled her fist back again.

"Glad to see you know your place," she said, adding insult to injury and Satsuki grabbed

Ryuko by the wrist of her newly readied fist, pulling her back down the aisle.

Originally, Ryuko had planned on carrying Satsuki, bridal style of course, out of the church. She had planned on then taking her to Kyoto. It was a six hour drive, but Ryuko could make it in a little over four hours and they would have had plenty to talk about. Everything had gotten all turned around after she hit Sanageyama and she was getting nervous that Satsuki had said nothing since shoving Ryuko into the passenger's seat of her own car. Her first thought was that Satsuki was taking her back to the mansion, but after a while it was clear that they were going to the private airfield. Satsuki stopped the car a few feet from the waiting jet and got out of the car, pulling Ryuko out of the passenger seat and onto the steps. Ryuko pulled back against Satsuki as somebody began to drive her car away and Satsuki yanked Ryuko sharply into the jet. They each sat down quickly as the engines roared to life and in spite of all the adrenaline still running through her system, Ryuko fell fast asleep shortly after take off.

When she woke up, she was in one of the beds in the rear of the jet, her head resting on Satsuki's chest. She snapped up, noticing that both Satsuki, and herself, were no longer in the clothing they wore when they boarded.

"I love you and I don't care. That's exactly what I would have said." Satsuki spoke softly as she ran her thumb across Ryuko's lips.

"You knew I was going to do that."

"I hoped you would. I thought you would pull another kidnaping stunt before the wedding, but when you suddenly resigned, I wasn't sure if I'd ever see you again." Ryuko shook her head slowly before kissing Satsuki gently. When they broke apart, she pulled at the plain white t-shirt she was now wearing.

"How did you…?"

"You weren't kidding when you said you pass out on planes. I've re-arranged you from some interesting positions to put pillows behind your head and you never wake up." Ryuko laughed and stretched as she yawned. Satsuki got up and made her way to the dining table as an attendant brought meals out.

"Where are we going?" Ryuko asked as she picked up her utensils.

"Paris. There is something I need to take care of before we can take some time to relax from all of this."

When they landed, they immediately set out to the one and only piece of business Satsuki would attend to, the final meeting with Area 17. She was finally able to figure out why Satsuki was employing their services. Satsuki, it seemed, had been planning on separating Kiryuin Industries from REVOCS and was going to have Area 17 handle branding and web design. They made the deal and went their separate ways and eventually, Ryuko and Satsuki found themselves sitting under the Eiffel Tower.

"If you've been planning this the entire time, why were you actually going to go through with marrying that asshole?" It was the only thing that Ryuko couldn't figure out.

"This was a contingency plan. When mother brought me into REVOCS to save it from going under and I began expanding, everything Kiryuin Industries did was still untimely under her control. Everything except the name 'Kiryuin Industries', the private jet, and the airfield." She smiled when Ryuko snickered. "Unfortunately, we'll have to start almost from the beginning, but it won't be long before REVOCS falls apart and things return to the way they were. We've gathered enough resources and have enough skills to start our own divisions. Mostly Jakuzure's biotechnology and Inumuta's IT development."

"Why did you cancel the last meeting that you had me planning?" At this, Satsuki blushed and looked at her hands.

"You wouldn't even look at me. I didn't think I'd need a contingency plan." Ryuko threaded her fingers through Satsuki's and pulled her up off the bench.

"Come on. Let's go to the top." Ryuko was grinning as Satsuki groaned. "You said you'd indulge my tourist fancies!"

"Very well," Satsuki sighed heavily and Ryuko stopped suddenly, hand digging in her pocket for something.

"Ok, ok. Look, I won't make you go to the top of the tower if…" Satsuki rolled her eyes.

"Please, I've had enough ultimatums for a lifetime. Don't-"

"If you marry me." Satsuki was shocked into silence and a couple passers by stopped, noticing Ryuko down on one knee, holding out a tiny box with a ring. "Not like, right away. I mean, I understand if you want some time before-" Satsuki pulled Ryuko up. "That was dumb. I-I probably shouldn't have asked," Ryuko stuttered as she closed the tiny box.

"Yes," Satsuki said and Ryuko started spluttering again.

"I know. S-sorry. I just, I don't know. I-"

"Yes, I'll marry you." Satsuki held out her hand and Ryuko's face lit up again. She slid the ring on Satsuki's finger and the small crowd that stopped to watch began to applaud as they kissed.

Back at the hotel, they ordered room service and spent the entire evening in bed. Satsuki was feeding Ryuko grapes when she reached out and pulled her tie off.

"When did you get this? Did you have it the whole time?" Satsuki asked, admiring the ring on her hand as Ryuko got up and peeled pieces of her suit off.

"Had it in my tux. I was gonna propose right at the alter after my little rant but…my plan got

a little screwed up." Satsuki snorted and reached behind her to unzip her dress. "I'm not complaining. Punching that dick in the face, being dragged off to Paris, and popping the question where it all began works just as well." Ryuko switched the lamp on the nightstand off and slid under the sheets. Luckily for them both, the time they slept on the plane made up for the sleep they didn't get that night.

They spent three days in the city, Satsuki dragging Ryuko to all sorts of different places and sights. They spent the whole fourth day in The Louvre and the whole fifth day in the gardens of Versailles. They packed up and readied themselves to go back to reality the next day. As usual, Ryuko fell asleep in her seat after take off and woke up about five hours later. She had to blink a few times to clear the deja-vu of waking up and finding Satsuki working on her laptop at the table.

"What are you doing?" Ryuko asked as she took the seat across from Satsuki.

"I'm preparing the new business model and plans to start a new division."

"Are you trying to bring Iori on?"

"Iori has been preparing to separate from REVOCS for as long as I have. He would have gone independent, but he made a proposition to me a few months ago."

"Oh? I guess it's not really important for me to know but-" Satsuki interrupted her, a serious look on her face.

"It's very important for you to know. It seems your charming friend Mako hit him with a thunderbolt of inspiration. They will be working together and you will be handling the business end. You are the new COO of Kiryuin industries."

"What?! Holy shit. What do I do?" Ryuko had worked in the business world for years but had never actually been the one handling the business.

"Relax. You will work very closely with me until you get a handle on things and at first you will deal only with Iori and Mako." Ryuko spent the rest of the flight asking a million questions. By the time they were asked to return to their seats for the final descent, Ryuko was more excited than nervous about her new position. When the jet arrived they were welcomed by Iori, Gamagori, Inumuta, and Jakuzure. They all had their right hands in a fist over their hearts in a sort of salute.

"Welcome back lady Satsuki," they all said at once.

"I assume you've all made the transition into the new office and things are beginning to operate?" Satsuki asked and they all answered in unison.

"Affirmative."

"Excellent. Matoi and I will be starting tomorrow and we begin a new empire." They all nodded as Ryuko's Camaro came speeding towards the jet. She prepared to yell at whatever

jerk off was driving her pride and joy like that, but when it screeched to a halt, Mako was yelling out the window.

"Get in shit head! We have a lot to celebrate!" Ryuko looked at Satsuki who smiled softly, nodding for her to go ahead and she gave her a swift kiss before hopping in the car. Tomorrow, she would be COO extrodinaire, but tonight, she was a punk.

End Notes

I also feel I should point out that almost every place they go in this story actually exists. I am also in no way affiliated with Area 17 (they seemed like a cool company and the fact that they have offices in NY and Paris was just perfect). The only place (besides the obvious Kiryuin Industries and REVOCS) that is fictional (in case you decide to do as much research as I did) is the burger place in Decks. Sadly, there is no burger joint in Decks.

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